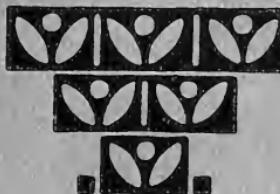
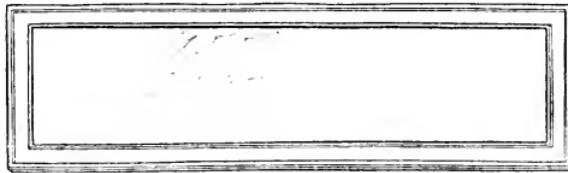
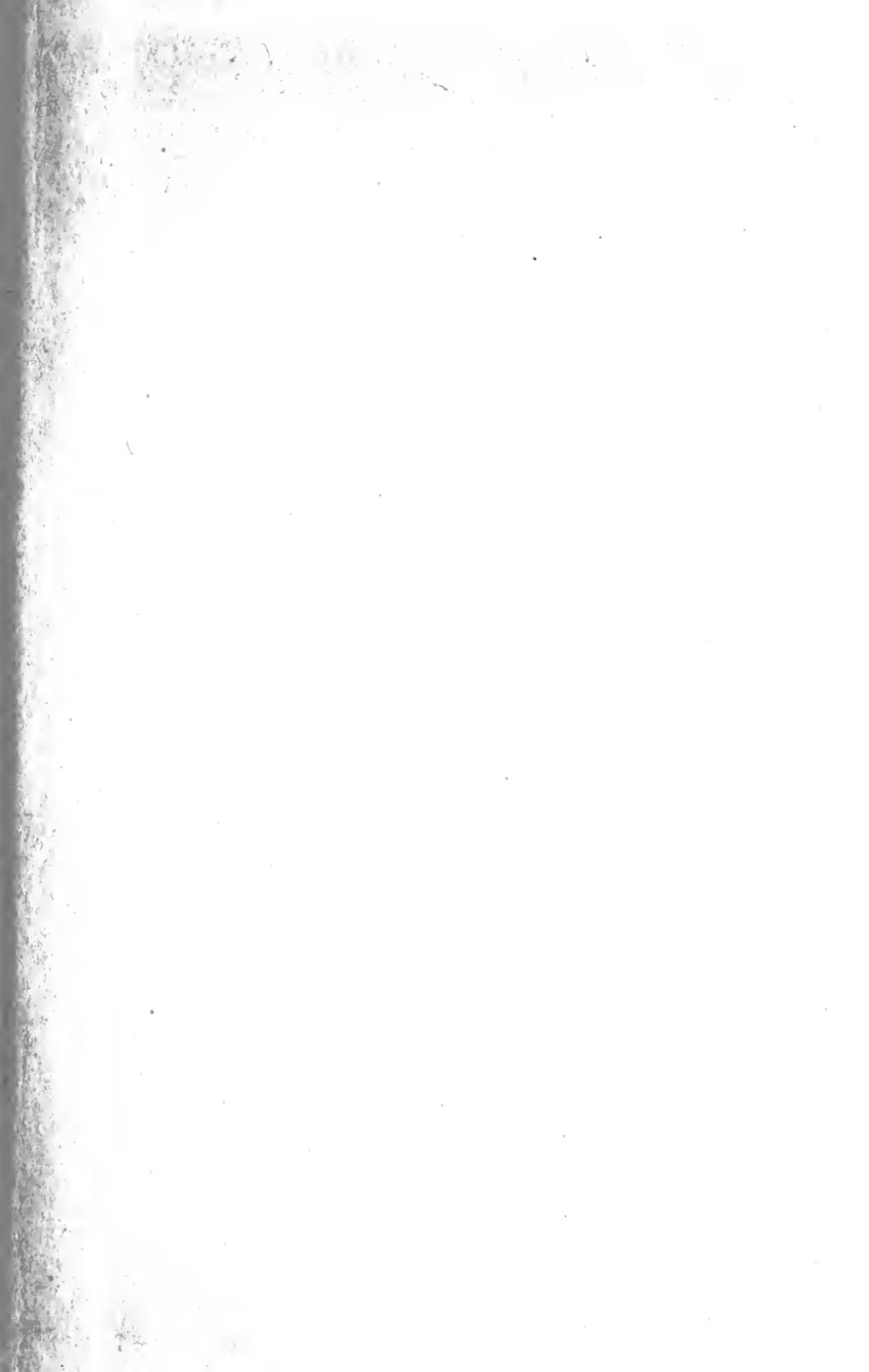


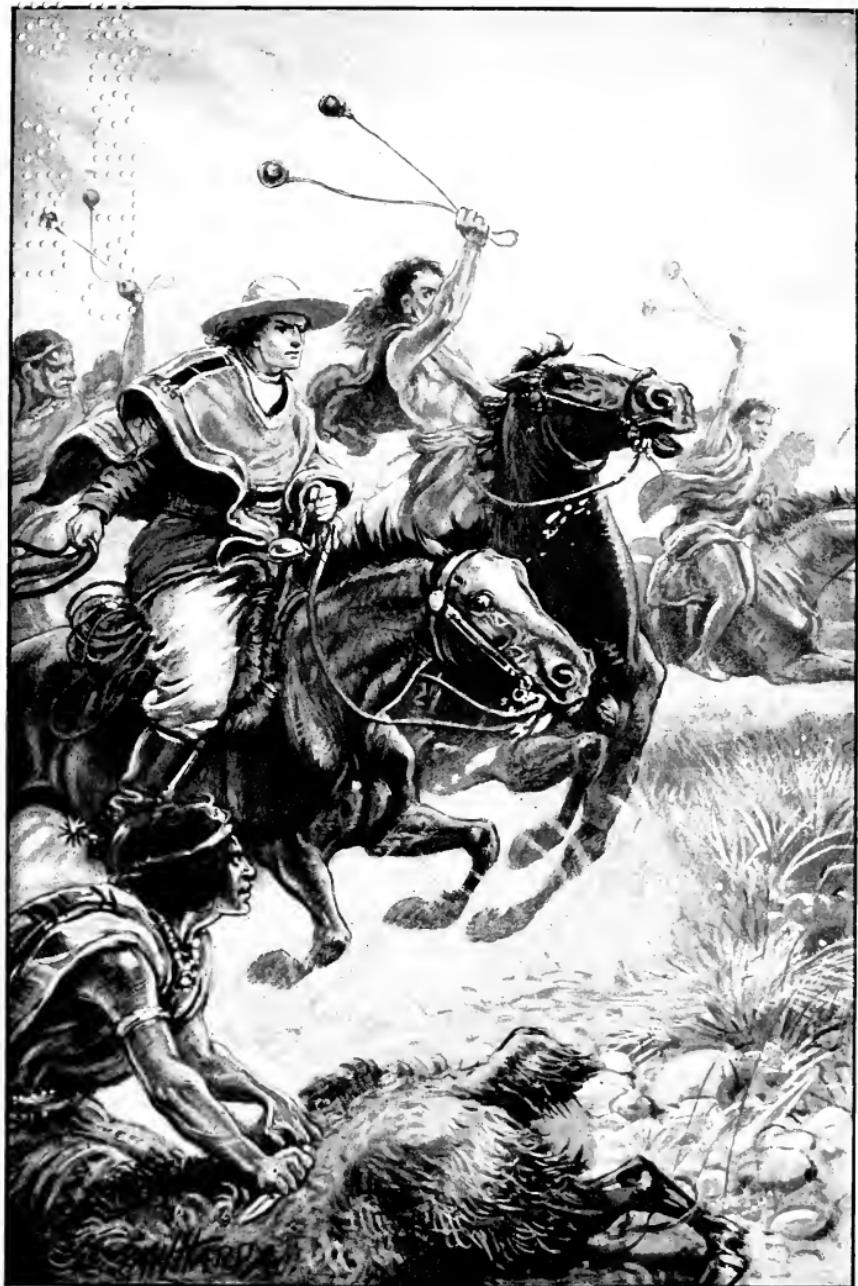
IN THE DICTATOR'S GRIP

JOHN SAMSON









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SWINGING THE BOLAS

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Frontispiece

In the Dictator's Grip

A Story of Adventure

BY

JOHN SAMSON

With Illustrations by Paul Hardy

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PREFACE

It may interest readers to learn that, although this book has been written in the form of fiction, it is also intended to give a true account of a period of South American history with regard to which information has hitherto been difficult to obtain by those unacquainted with the Spanish language. The historical events have been related with strict attention to accuracy in dates and details; the manners and customs, both of the Spanish colonists and of the Indians of the time, have been depicted from data given by contemporary writers, and many of the localities have been described from personal experience.

JOHN SAMSON.

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IN THE DICTATOR'S GRIP

CHAPTER I

UNCONGENIAL ENVIRONMENTS

AND I tell you again, I will not listen to such talk, so go back to your work at once, Steve. You're far too ready to leave it on any pretext. How could you venture to ask me such a thing, knowing what I think of such vanities?"

"Oh, Father," pleaded a gentle voice, "don't be so hard on the boy; it's but little chance he has of getting pleasure."

"Woman, you are as bad as he. How can you dream that I would allow anyone belonging to me to go near such a performance? Even if he had not his work to do, is not life too solemn a matter to be frittered away in such frivolities? Go to a circus indeed! it's little, if any, better than those temples of Satan, the theatres. So off you go to your turnip-hoeing, Steve!"

The speaker, an elderly man, whose iron-gray hair and hard features betokened a strong will, from whose determination there was no appeal, walked to the door as he concluded, casting a fierce glance at the lad who had made the petition so summarily rejected. His dress and appearance were indicative of his rank, occupation, and disposition—a working farmer, but one degree higher than a labourer, whose hard struggle for life had accentuated the natural

austerity of his temper. Truth to tell, these were hard times for the agricultural classes, even the highest of them — these years when England was struggling for its existence against a combination of foreign foes headed by the much-dreaded "Corsican Usurper", whose name alone served to terrify naughty children, when mothers threatened to send them to "Boney". It was in 1806, a year after Nelson's great but final victory had thrilled the world, and fired many a British boy with an eager desire to be off and win laurels in the naval service.

Even to the remote village, in the most rural district of the West of England, near which the farmhouse stood, the story of these victories had penetrated. It had excited in Stephen Herrick, almost to a passionate degree, the longing to be a sailor, which, as far back as he could remember, he had constantly felt. That he should have such a desire was to himself a mystery; for he had never, to his recollection, seen the sea, nor even a lake upon which boats could be sailed. His environment had been always that of ploughed fields and pasture-lands. The few companions he had made amongst the congregation of the meeting-house, with whom he conversed before and after the service on Sunday, could talk of nothing but cattle and crops, or such simple matters as interest the rustic mind. In habit of body he was as different from the villagers as in ideas. They, heavy in gait and slow of speech; he, active as a cat, alert in word and gesture. The clodhoppers stared in amazement as they saw him scramble rapidly up the highest trees and swing lightly from branch to branch like a monkey. At the village feasts he carried off easily, against all competitors, the prizes for climbing the greasy pole, walking the spar, and other feats of agility. Although only fifteen and a half years of age, he looked almost a man. Dark in complexion, with curling black hair, handsome and muscular,

any stranger who met him would at once have said he was certainly a seafaring lad masquerading in a smock-frock.

Sometimes Stephen thought that his longing for the sea must have originated from the effect on his imagination of a picture which hung over the chimney-piece in the principal room of the farmhouse. It was a scene in a naval battle, one of those works which were so frequently produced at that time, when England's glory on the seas was at its highest. On the right, two ships, with every stitch of canvas spread and flying the French ensign, were evidently doing their best to get away; whilst on the left a majestic British squadron, as shown by the meteor flag, was rapidly coming up in pursuit. From the bow of the leading English ship a cannon had just been fired, the waves of smoke standing out against the broad white fore-sail. A crowd of blue-jackets looked eagerly from the topgallant forecastle, whilst from the mizzen rigging an officer watched the "chase" with a telescope. Whence came the picture, and what did it portray? Stephen never could learn. His father was not one to whom he could venture to put many questions. Scarcely a word passed the lips of the stern old man as he sat there, night after night, gloomily poring over his big Bible upon a small table near his arm-chair, until sometimes he dropped off to sleep, worn out by his toil in the fields. A whispered appeal to his gentle mother brought little information.

"The picture had been given to them many years ago," she said, "by a dear friend now dead."

That solved some of the mystery, for he well knew that his father was not one to buy works of art. All things of beauty were regarded by this stern Puritan as "vanities, carnal vanities", and Stephen had noticed that he never raised his eyes to the picture.

Though his mother professed to be unable to tell him

anything about the picture, it sometimes seemed to the boy that she had some secret and sad associations with it, for he observed, as she gazed upon the canvas, that her eyes were full of moisture; but nothing she had ever said confirmed this idea.

There were no books of history, nor indeed any but a few devotional works, in the scanty library of the farmhouse, so that there was nothing to be learned elsewhere, and the interpretation of the scene had to be left to the boy's imagination. But freely did his fancy play around it. Every night his eyes were riveted upon the view. It was indeed the only object worthy of attention in that dismal and poorly-furnished room. Ignorant of seafaring matters as he was, he seemed to have some intuition which served to explain it. Whenever the old man was absent, even if for a short time while he went to attend to his horses and cattle, Stephen would burst out with: "I know all about it now, Mother," and would proceed to tell her some story he had framed. Each ship had a name, and even the officers and men. He would say, too, whither they were bound, and when the events happened. Wild as these conjectures naturally were, considering the boy's ignorance of history and geography, they always seemed to excite admiration and wonder in his mother, who would gaze upon him tenderly, at times sighing sadly; why, he could never comprehend.

With such a temperament as his, it was easy to understand why he revolted against the unceasing drudgery of a farm, and the laborious, uninteresting work he was compelled to perform. From early morn till night, the old man, who was indeed a severe taskmaster, kept him hard at it, with always another work to take up so soon as that which he was at could be finished. No word of sympathy did he ever receive. What relaxation he obtained was

given grudgingly. For his mother's sake—she scarcely dared to speak, but appealed by her looks—the boy bore it as patiently as he could; but youthful nature will occasionally assert itself, and he would sometimes leave his work on a summer afternoon, and go off with some other lads to indulge in his favourite pastime, bird-nesting, the temptation of exciting the admiration of his companions by his climbing feats being greater than he could resist. When this happened, and the old man discovered it, the penalty Stephen had to bear was severe. First, a long lecture upon the sins of idleness and disobedience, in which quotations from the Scriptures were freely used; and then physical chastisement, the instrument of which was generally a horsewhip. As he grew bigger and stronger, Stephen gradually felt impelled to defend himself and even to retaliate, but the awe which he had felt for the old man since his infancy, and consideration for his mother, restrained him. Sometimes he would be sent supperless to bed, but at these times he knew that, if possible, his kind mother would slip up furtively to his room, and thrust some food, a piece of bread and butter only in most cases, into his hand, and whisper a few words of consolation.

“Be patient, my boy.”

“Mother, dear,” he would say, “I cannot long stand it; I shall run off to sea some day. I know I shall.” But his mother's influence prevailed to stimulate endurance.

On the morning upon which the conversation related at the opening of this story took place, the whole country-side was in a state of wild excitement. Something unprecedented had happened. A circus troupe had actually come to the village, and the report quickly spread that a performance would be given that afternoon.

It was a bright day in autumn. Stephen was engaged hoeing turnips in a field near the high-road when the pro-

cession of vans and horses made its appearance. Unable to resist the attraction of the novel sight, he threw down his hoe and ran to the roadside. Never had he seen such a sight before, and his wonder grew to amazement when the long line wound up with two enormous animals of uncouth appearance, which somebody said were elephants. Nothing could have induced him to return to his labour. He at once went to the house, even though he had little hope of success, to beg permission from his father to go to the village to see the show. What the result was can be gathered from the opening sentences of this chapter.

When the old man had left the room, Mrs. Herrick, though she had pleaded with her husband to indulge her son, apparently thought it her duty to chide him for proposing to play truant, and gently asked him to go back to his work. The lad went off sullenly towards the field, but as he got farther from the house his step became less resolute, and finally he appeared to take a sudden decision, and, turning quickly, ran off towards the village.

Arrived at the village green, he found the vans drawn up, the horses unharnessed and feeding from their nose-bags, and the men busily engaged in erecting a large tent. Eagerly he watched every proceeding. Suddenly he observed a poster stuck up announcing the performance. It was headed by a picture showing various equestrian feats, and included a list of the prices of admission. Despair at once seized him. The pictures had more than ever excited his curiosity, but the cost—he had no money, his father took care of that, he had never let him have a penny in his life. What could he do?

At this moment a man, apparently the proprietor, came to the door of the tent and shouted: "Come, my lads! Those of you who lend us a hand in making the ring shall see the performance free!"

Stephen was the first to jump at the chance, and was at once selected, with two or three other stalwart youths, for the job. For the next hour he worked harder than he had ever done on the farm, and then he hung about, impatiently waiting for the time of his reward.

Who can describe the ecstasy of a lad's first view of a circus performance, especially one with such a temperament as Stephen's! All thoughts of his disobedience and its probable consequences disappeared, and he became entirely absorbed in the spectacle. Never could he have imagined such cleverness as that shown by the acrobats, nor that such beauty and grace could be displayed by horses. The rope-dancers, trapeze performers, and jugglers all gave him new ideas of feats which he hoped to attempt himself some day. The performing elephants filled him with wonder, whilst the antics and jokes of the clowns—all new to him—threw him into uncontrollable mirth. When at last the show was over, and he was wending his way homeward, his joy was suddenly clouded by the thought of the reception he might expect at his journey's end.

CHAPTER II

A REVELATION AND A RESOLUTION

WHEN Stephen reached the farmhouse he found that the evening meal had just been placed upon the table. The savoury smell made a direct appeal to his appetite, for he had had nothing to eat since the morning, though in the excitement of the performance he had for a time forgotten his hunger. The boy slid into his accustomed place as quietly as possible, hoping against hope to

escape observation; but there was a glare in the old man's eye which showed that his entrance had not been overlooked. The explosion he expected did not come at once. Slowly the farmer rose to his feet, and began the long grace it was his invariable custom to repeat before meals. Stephen could scarcely avoid a shudder as he heard the familiar words: "For what we are about to receive, &c.", uttered in what appeared to him a fierce rather than a thankful tone. The formality over, the old man turned at once to the boy, the scowl upon his hard features giving them a terrific expression.

"Where have you been?" he cried. "Have you really dared to disobey me by leaving your work to go to that vile circus?"

Stephen hung his head, but made no answer.

"Leave the room at once!" roared the enraged farmer. "No supper will you get to-night. Go to the barn, and wait there till I come!"

The boy walked quietly away, his only consolation being a compassionate glance from his mother as he went. To Stephen, as he lay huddled up in the cold barn, it appeared as if hours passed before the farmer appeared, with a candle in one hand and a heavy riding-whip in the other.

"And now," said the old man, "I must do my duty by chastising you for your disobedience; but the Lord above knows that I am a just man, and I ask you, first, have you anything to say to justify your conduct?"

Stephen remained silent. Experience had taught him that it was of no use to speak; he knew the formula and its usual sequence.

Without further delay the farmer proceeded with his self-imposed task. It is needless to enter into a description of its harrowing details. Never had he wielded the whip more vigorously, or displayed such animosity in the remarks

with which he seemed to incite himself to further efforts. Strong in his frame as Stephen was, he felt sorely inclined to resistance, but was restrained by that feeling of awe towards the old man in which he had been brought up, and especially by the idea of respect due to parents, which had been so carefully inculcated into his mind by his mother.

Yet it seemed to him that there could be little parental love in one who could treat him so harshly, and whose every tone expressed fierce hatred. Even in his agony it seemed to the boy incongruous to hear his father call him "Son of Belial", "Child of the Evil One".

At length, wearied by his exertions, the farmer threw the boy from him on to a heap of straw, and commanded him to go to bed at once.

More dead than alive, Stephen crawled to the wretched attic which served him as bedchamber, flung himself on his bed without undressing, and, burying his head in the clothes, sobbed himself into a sort of stupor.

Utterly worn out with pain, hunger, and cold, he lay, how long he could not tell, until he was aroused by a soft cool hand laid upon his brow. He knew it could be no one but his mother. Taking advantage of the old man's absence on his nightly tour of inspection round the farmyard, she had stolen up to give what comfort she could to the lad.

For a time she could say nothing but "Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy!" mingling her warm tears with Stephen's as he, utterly broken down, sobbed upon her shoulder. Then she gently tried to induce him to eat some of the food she had brought with her. Hungry as he was, the lad refused. A feeling of burning rage had now risen within him which almost choked him.

"I hate him! I hate him!" he cried wildly. "He'll never get a chance again to thrash me!" And he continued

for minutes giving vent to his feelings in incoherent exclamations.

"Hush, Stephen, dear! you must not speak of your father like that," gently remonstrated the mother.

"He my father! I cannot believe it!" almost shrieked the boy. "He's a monster! a brute! I will acknowledge no duty to him."

It was too dark for Stephen to see his mother's face, but he was surprised to discover that his words had a terrible effect upon her. She endeavoured to draw her hand from his grasp, she trembled violently, and suddenly her tears gushed forth in torrents. She tried to speak several times, but her voice failed her, and she could only continue to sob spasmodically.

"Mother, dear!" said the alarmed boy, clasping her more closely, "what is the matter? You know that I shall always love you, and—and—perhaps, for your sake, I will try to do my duty—with him."

"Stephen, my son," at length said the mother in a quavering voice, "I must tell you—I ought to have told you long ago. He is not your father!"

"What!" cried the boy, rising excitedly; "what! not my father! Mother, what do you mean?"

"Be calm, dear, be calm, and you shall hear all. No; your father was as gallant a sailor as ever breathed."

It was easy to tell the boy to be calm, but how could he be expected to remain tranquil? "What! his father a sailor!" A flood of thoughts rushed through his brain. "A sailor! that accounted for his longing for the sea."

"Quick, Mother, quick! tell me more!" he cried, clasping her waist tightly in his excitement.

"Yes," she resumed in a slow, reflective voice, as if looking into the past, "he was a sailor, and my first love. We had grown up together, and though he was frequently away

at sea, he always declared, when he came back to Bristol (where we were both born), that his love for 'his little girl' grew stronger with each absence. Ah! it was a happy day when he came at last and said that he had been promoted to the rank of mate, and there was nothing now to prevent our getting married. And happy was the year which followed our marriage, the year in which you were born, even though he had been away on the ocean for some months of it. In our little cottage home near the sea I waited patiently for him, eagerly watching every sail when the time came that his ship was expected home. Alas! alas! You and that picture which hangs downstairs, together with my fond memories, are all that I have now left to me of two short years. Only a month or two more of happiness was vouchsafed to us, for at length a day came when he joyfully sailed, proud of his new position as mate of a larger ship than he had ever been in before, and from that day to this neither he nor his ship has ever been heard of. You were only about a year old at the time, and of course can remember nothing of this, nor of the weary, weary waiting, the anxiety, and at last despair, which came upon me when his ship, many months overdue, was finally given up by the owners as lost.

"And not only had I to bear my grief, but I soon had to contend with poverty as well. When the owners concluded that the vessel was lost, they ceased to pay me the wages my husband was entitled to, the greater part of which he had left for me. Then came a hard struggle; yet when I had gradually to part with all I could possibly do without, I always managed to keep that picture. It was a present which my loved one had given me, and which he had prized as the best of our possessions. Often he had pointed out its beauties to me, and told me its story—Oh, my boy! when I have heard you so

frequently speak about it, and ask its meaning, I have again and again felt tempted to tell you the story, but I could not do so, for reasons which, when I have told you all, you will understand.

“Ebenezer Herrick, a distant cousin of my husband, your father, who, I should have told you, was named Roger Herrick, was very kind to me at this time. He was always a somewhat austere man, but at that period he was not so hard, at least to me, as now. He had then a farm of considerable size near the town, and was far more prosperous than at present—the misfortunes he has since met with have helped to sour his disposition. At that time, however, he was apparently a kind man, always in a quiet and discreet way. What I could have done without his aid I do not know; not to have felt gratitude towards him would have been impossible. But when, about three years after Roger had gone, he proposed that I might form a closer relationship with him, my heart revolted, nor would I think of it until another year had gone, and then I at last consented, mainly for your sake, my son. Oh that it should have turned out as it has!

“Ebenezer strongly desired that you should be taught to consider him as your real father, and, hoping that I was acting for the best, I weakly gave way.”

A sound below announced that the farmer had returned from his round, and, fearful that he might discover her absence, the mother wished her son a hasty good-night. Whispering once more: “Be patient, Stephen! Be patient for my sake!” she slipped away.

Quickly throwing off his clothes, Stephen tumbled into bed. Exhausted though he was with the labours and excitement of the eventful day, he found himself quite unable to sleep. The surprising story he had just heard set his brain in a whirl. The thought of that dead father

whom he had never seen, nor till that moment heard of, filled his mind for hours, to the exclusion of the incidents of the day. He conjured up in his imagination visions of his appearance and of his career. He saw him walking the deck of a white-sailed ship gliding over the blue water. Then at last his thoughts turned to what he had just passed through, and he contrasted his father with the hard-faced old farmer downstairs, and again anger filled his breast. More than ever did he long to be off to sea, and then and there he finally resolved he would go, in spite of all difficulties, cost what it might. At last, completely worn out, he fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER III

STEPHEN LEAVES HOME

THE morning found Stephen more than ever confirmed in his resolution to leave home and go to sea, but as he began to consider ways and means, he soon realized the difficulties which confronted him. He had not a farthing he could call his own, for the farmer had never allowed him any wages, nor could he expect him to do so without a struggle. Both the nature and the poverty of the man were against his parting with money; besides, it was a principle amongst the sect to which he belonged, that it was wrong to let young people have cash, as it only led them into temptation.

Nevertheless, the boy saw that without money he could do nothing to accomplish his object, and he resolved to make every effort to obtain it. As he went down to the tool-house for his hoe he suddenly met the farmer, who

gave him a short command to "Hurry, and make up for lost time".

Stephen took a sudden determination, and stopped and faced him. "I have something to say to you, sir," he said, "before I begin work."

The old man looked at him with astonishment. Well he might, for there was a remarkable change in the bearing of the lad. But yesterday he would have slunk away before the farmer's lowering gaze; to-day he stood erect and looked him firmly in the face. A single night had wrought a transformation.

"Well, what is it?" growled the farmer; and Stephen was also surprised to observe, or fancy he detected, a lurking dread in the old man's eye. Was it possible, he wondered, that his mother had told her husband what had passed between them last night?

"This," he boldly replied. "I want you to understand that I shall not go on working for you unless you agree to pay me some wages, and also come to an arrangement as to the number of hours I am expected to work."

For a moment the farmer was too astonished to speak; then came the explosion. "What!" he roared; "what is the meaning of this? Are you not lodged, clothed, and fed at my expense? How dare you expect more, you ungrateful wretch!" and so he continued his objurgations for some minutes, mixing his violent language with Scriptural quotations as was his wont. At length, having exhausted his vocabulary of expletives, he concluded with: "Be off to your work, and let me hear no more of such talk."

Stephen had stood quietly weathering the storm, without faltering from his determined attitude. When it was over he picked up his hoe and said: "Yes, I am going to work now, but I only give you until to-morrow to make up your mind on the subject."

During the day they met in the course of their work and at meals as usual. It was evident, however, that the old man was thinking seriously over the matter. He knew perfectly well that a strong lad like Stephen would have little difficulty in finding work on some of the neighbouring farms. Men were not plentiful in those days, when so many were being drafted into the army to fill up the gaps in the ranks made by the numerous battles England was then fighting. The farmer knew that if he lost Stephen he would have to employ someone else, who would certainly ask for more wages than what he believed would satisfy the lad, so he at length concluded that it would be better for his interest to accede to the demand.

Next morning, therefore, he grudgingly informed Stephen that he had decided to allow him wages at the rate of six shillings a week, out of which he would have to pay for his clothes; and his hours would be from six in the morning until six at night, with the usual hours for meals.

It was very little to earn, but Stephen felt elated, nevertheless, at having gained the first step.

He saw, however, that it would take many months before he could save the amount which he thought would be necessary for his purpose, and he therefore began to cast about for some other means to augment his income. In earlier years his mother had, with much pains, taught him reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic. These were no ordinary acquirements amongst the rural population of the time, and he began to think that he might make use of them. Being now at liberty to go where he chose after the evening meal, he began by paying visits to all the people in the neighbourhood above the rank of cottagers, and offered his services in whatever way they could be useful. To his gratification he soon found plenty to do. Stephen had always been popular, and the farmers were

struck with such admiration at his wanting more work after having laboured in the fields all day that, in mere good-nature at first, they contrived to put little jobs in his way; but soon they found him to be almost indispensable. He helped them to make up their accounts and to write their letters. Some even asked him to give lessons to their children, for there were few schools in those days.

It was a life of constant toil, more especially as he had generally to walk considerable distances to the houses where he was employed. His mother was greatly astonished at the sudden change which she observed in the lad's character. Often she would remonstrate and ask him why he need work himself so hard; but Stephen only smiled, and said that he wanted to relieve her husband from the expense of keeping him. Frequently the mother and son would, when the farmer's absence gave them the chance, revert to the subject of that eventful night's conversation, so intensely interesting to both. Stephen urged his mother to tell him more about his father, but she had little to add. She could only say that he had been mate of the *Flying Fish*, in which he had traded regularly to the West Indies for some years, and that his last voyage had been in the ship *Bristol Clipper* on a voyage to the East Indies, round the Cape of Good Hope. He had sailed in 1791, and no tidings had ever been heard of the ship.

Although unfaltering in his determination to leave home, Stephen never breathed a word of his project to his mother. He feared her gentle pleadings, the only thing which might make him swerve from his decision.

At length, after some months of this industrious life, Stephen began to think that he had come within measurable distance of carrying his plans into execution. It had been no light task, and had called for much self-denial.

Several times he had had a set-back owing to the absolute necessity of replacing his boots or other articles of clothing which had worn beyond repair. But he nightly counted his store of shillings and pence, which he kept in a little bag in a hole in his mattress.

It was well towards the end of October before he had collected the meagre fund with which he thought it prudent to venture. But now he had reached it at last, and he determined to wait no longer.

On the night on which he had made up his mind to take his flight he did not go to rest at all, but spent the short period between bed-time and the hour he had fixed for setting out in anxious reflection and in packing up his few belongings. He wrote a long and tender farewell to his mother, begging her to pardon him for the step he was about to take, and lamenting that circumstances would not permit of saying farewell. He promised to write to her as soon as he could, and to keep her informed of his movements as often as possible.

About two in the morning he slipped noiselessly downstairs. Upon the living-room table he had laid the note to his mother. There was no moon, so he could not take a last glance at the dear old picture as he wished.

As he opened the house door he was startled by a loud growl from old Roger, the watch-dog, but a pat on the head reassured the faithful guardian that it was only a friend passing. Cautiously he wended his way across the farmyard and was soon out on the road. Familiar as he was with the path, the deep gloom was scarcely a hindrance to his progress. Soon the dark mass of the house, against the sombre sky, vanished from his sight, and then, in spite of all the misery he had experienced there, Stephen's eyes filled with tears. He wondered how long it would be before he would again see his mother.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE ROAD TO BRISTOL TOWN

STEPHEN'S first thought was to get away as far as possible from the farmhouse which had been so long his home. Not that he feared pursuit, he knew that Ebenezer Herrick would not make any great endeavour to bring him back; the farmer's only regret would probably be that of having to pay someone to do his work at a higher rate. So he ran along the road at his top speed, without caring what direction he took. He had long ago made up his mind that his destination would be Bristol, the port from which his father had sailed, and where he himself had been born. But though he had made cautious enquiries in the village and round about with regard to the distance and route to the capital of the west of England, he had never found anyone who could give him any definite information. Poor folk did not travel much in those days of costly coaches and post-chaises.

He had gathered that Bristol was about sixty or seventy miles distant in a westerly direction, but as he had no compass, and had never, to his recollection, been far beyond the village, such knowledge did not help him much.

He walked on steadily all night and until nearly an hour after sunrise, which happened about half-past seven at that time of the year. Then he stopped for rest and refreshment at a roadside ale-house. Having called for a half-pint of ale and some bread and cheese, he began his breakfast with the good appetite which exercise and the morning air had given him in spite of his anxiety. Then he began putting questions to the landlord as to the best road to take for Bristol. The yawning landlord, who apparently

had scarcely got over the effects of last night's potations, replied in a husky voice that he had never been so far from home, and could not give him explicit directions.

At that moment a man who had just entered the ale-house, and had overheard the conversation, exclaimed:

"Is it Bristol ye want, sor? Sure you're in luck, for it's meself that knows every fut of the way, the more betoken I'm on the road there this blessed minit, an' afther going back to me own counthry."

The speaker was a man of short stature, but apparently well-knit and active. He was dressed like a labourer, such as those who tramp the country in harvest-time, when they come over from Ireland in search of work. He wore a cap made of moleskin and carried a stout stick. After hearing his talk there was no need to ask what country he alluded to.

"Well, that is lucky," cried Stephen. "Will you allow me to travel with you? You see that, like yourself, I shall have to get there on 'shanks's pony'."

"With all the pleasure in life!" replied the Irishman, who appeared to be a genial soul. "Faith, an' it's always heartsome to have company!"

Stephen could not do less than offer his new acquaintance some refreshment, and a pot of ale was readily accepted. In settling the score Stephen pulled out his little bag, which appeared to be well filled; silver and coppers are bulky. The sharp glance at it which the Irishman gave might have disquieted him had he been of a suspicious nature.

Together the new friends set out on the road, and Stephen continued to congratulate himself upon his good fortune in meeting so capable a guide. It was evident that the Irishman, who gave the name of Dan Maguire, was no stranger in those parts. He knew the name of

every village they passed through, and of every large country house, especially the seats of the country gentry. He greatly surprised Stephen by the intimate and detailed knowledge which he appeared to possess with regard to the people who lived in each. He knew the names, and even the disposition, of each family.

"If ye were to call up yonder," he would say, pointing to a house, "devil a thing would ye get but a dhrink of water, and grudgingly at that." And again, "Now the folks at that house are what I call rale dacent; it's plenty of bread and cheese they'll give a poor chap, and maybe even a glass of ale if the day's warm."

It gradually dawned upon Stephen that this was no casual agricultural labourer in search of work, but a regular professional tramp. This discovery was not pleasing, for farming people, among whom the lad had grown up, were apt to look upon tramps as a very bad lot, holding them to be pilferers and nuisances, rogues and vagabonds, all.

However, Stephen consoled himself with the idea that he would only keep his company as far as Bristol, where he could easily shake him off. In the meantime he was not only an indispensable but a most entertaining companion. He had a great fund of that natural humour so characteristic of his compatriots, and was evidently of that "happy-go-lucky" disposition which, while it takes no thought of the future, takes mighty good care of the present. This Stephen found out on the second day of their journey.

Dan had, early in their acquaintance, wormed out of him much of his history and many of his plans, also the means he had at his disposal. All that day the Irishman had shown himself "very convanient" in accepting refreshment at Stephen's expense, and had even allowed the lad to pay for his bed at a country ale-house.

Next morning, however, soon after they had started, Dan broke out with: "Look here, Steven, avick, I like you, me boy, an' I'm going to do you a good turn. Ye've none too much rhino for what ye want to do, so why should ye spind it on the road?"

Stephen replied that he did not see how some expense could be avoided.

"Bedad, I'll soon show you how," said Dan.

When they next came to the lodge-gates of a gentleman's house, Dan carefully examined an obscure corner of the gate-pillar, and then exclaimed:

"It's all right. Just wait here till I come back, Steve."

"Where are you going?" curiously asked the lad.

"Just up to the house there. We're sure to get our breakfast from them."

"How can you know that?"

"Why, just look at that mark there," said the tramp, pointing to some cabalistic signs drawn in chalk on the side of the gate-pillar. "Ah, but I forgot! Ye're not up to such things yet."

So saying, he entered the avenue, leaving Stephen by the roadside.

In a quarter of an hour Dan came back laden with a good supply of bread and meat, and even a can of milk.

"How did you manage that?" queried the astonished Stephen.

"Och, just by blarney. I tould them that I had left me wife and five small children just fainting with starvation on the roadside. But we had better get behind the hedge, for fear the nice ould lady who helped me should come to have a look at the little 'uns."

After having disposed of as much as they could, and stowed away what was left for future use, Dan said:

"Now, if there's one thing I pride meself upon, it's

being honest, so I'll take them back the can. Just go slowly along, and I'll catch ye up."

The experience of the rest of the day showed the Irishman to be an adept in cadging, for they did not have to lay out a penny for food. Stephen did not altogether approve of this plan, but he concluded, after all, not to place objections in the way, as he would need the services of his purse when he came to be thrown upon his own resources.

As night drew near, the boy suggested that they would soon have to be on the look-out for an ale-house in which to take lodgings.

"Devil a bit," said Dan. "It's too mortal cowld to sleep out, I know, but I'll find ye snug enough quarters free of cost."

Soon he turned off the highway, up an occupation road, which Stephen saw, in the now rapidly-darkening twilight, led to a good-sized farmhouse, surrounded by outbuildings. Upon nearing it the Irishman, beckoning Stephen to follow, leaped over the hedge and cautiously worked his way round by the back.

"They've got a mighty comfortable pig-stye here," he said, "an' they killed the pig a fortnight ago, so it's likely to be empty. If ye're not too particular, it is just the place for us."

It turned out just as Dan had anticipated, and they were fortunate in being able to creep into the shed without discovery. By the aid of two bundles of straw, which Dan boldly went out into the farmyard to fetch, they were able to pass quite a warm and cozy night.

Next morning they were off before daybreak, and were able to make their way, with scarcely any outlay, by similar means to those they had employed the day before. The Irishman was never at a loss for a story or a ruse to extract charity.

On that night, however, they got a terrible fright. They had taken the same course as before to get a lodging, and Dan, closely followed by Stephen, had just crept into a pig-stye, when suddenly he screamed out:

“Mother o’ Moses! Holy Vargin, preserve us! What’s this?”

There was a loud growl, whilst two fierce eyes shone through the darkness. Stephen could hear that a terrible struggle was going on inside, and the Irishman’s cries became frantic. He ran to his aid, but was afraid to hit out in the darkness, for fear of injuring his friend. The people in the house had also heard the noise, for they rushed out to see what was the matter. One, evidently the farmer, carried a lighted candle. He was followed by two outlandish-looking men, dressed in sheep-skin coats and high-peaked hats with broad brims. To his surprise the foreigners burst into a roar of laughter, and then began calling out words which Stephen did not understand.

Soon the mystery was solved. The two strangers were men who travelled the country with a performing bear, and in return for their having given an entertainment to the farmer’s children they had been invited to stay the night at the house. The bear had been “stabled” in the pig-stye!

When the farmer threw a light into the shed it was seen that the unfortunate Irishman was being closely hugged in the embrace of Bruin, and it took all the commands of the bear-leaders, emphasized by blows from their sticks, to make the brute let go.

When Dan at last got free he was a woeful sight, his clothes torn, and the breath nearly squeezed out of his body.

“Sarves you right, you dirty tramps!” exclaimed the farmer. “What business have you coming round my

premises like this? Be off with the pair of you, or I'll have you locked up."

So, instead of getting sympathy, the unfortunate Dan and his companion were driven away with abuse, whilst they could hear the whole party roaring with laughter at their expense. They spent the rest of the night miserably under the lee of a haystack. Fortunately it did not rain.

Next day the irrepressible Irishman had recovered his spirits, and he was even able to "blarney" a complaisant servant-girl into mending his coat, whilst breakfasting at her employer's expense.

"By to-morrow," said Dan, as they crept into a shed that night, "we'll get into Bristol. It's just about ten miles off, straight along this road."

Stephen was terribly tired, as they had made a long day's march, and he soon fell into a sound sleep upon the straw.

When he awoke it was daylight, but he could see Dan nowhere.

"What can have become of him?" thought Stephen; and he searched in every direction, even venturing to call him softly, so as not to alarm the people in the farmhouse, from whom they had taken involuntary hospitality.

At length a horrible idea flashed through Stephen's brain. He felt for his little bag of money. It was gone!

Despair now seized upon him, and he broke down utterly, throwing himself on the turf by the roadside.

"The rascal! the blackguard!" he groaned. "I see it all now. It was his plan from the first. That was why he was so anxious I should spend as little as possible. I'm done for now! What was the use of all my slaving to make that money?" And again a paroxysm of despair seized him.

After the first explosion, however, he began to consider

his position more calmly. In one of his breeches-pockets he found half a crown. Acting upon the advice of the crafty Irishman, he had been in the habit of carrying a small sum there for any current expenses, so as to avoid displaying all his money. It was but a trifle, but enough to save him from immediate starvation. So he picked up his stick, and with a sturdy step set forth to cover the remaining ten miles between him and Bristol.

CHAPTER V

AN IDEAL SHATTERED

DESPITE the depression caused by his loss, and his anxiety with regard to the future, Stephen's spirits rose quickly as he entered Bristol about noon that day. There was much to excite his wonder, for he had never before been in a large city, and at first he was almost frightened and completely confused amidst the traffic of its busy streets. Every turn, as he advanced, brought new surprises. The buildings seemed to him superb beyond imagination, and the rich display of goods in the shops astounded him. The culmination of his admiration arrived when he stood at last before the magnificent church of St. Mary's Redcliffe, to this day one of the finest specimens of Gothic architecture in England.

The sea and the ships, however, were the great attractions which had drawn him to Bristol, and he eagerly asked to be directed to the harbour. Then, for the first time in his life he saw a vessel. For hours he stood by the quayside, forgetting his fatigue and hunger, absorbed only in contemplating the shipping. As a matter of fact they were but

small craft which could then come to Bristol, up the narrow winding river Avon, that looked little more than a ditch at low tide. But to Stephen they were marvels. All that afternoon he did nothing but watch the sailors at their work, sometimes venturing to ask a bystander a question that in many instances evoked a laugh from those who heard it, through its indicating the rustic ignorance of the lad.

But the sea, where was it, the bright blue expanse, brilliantly painted in the dear old picture he had gazed at so often? There were no signs of it in the mud-banks and dirty water of Bristol Harbour. In reply to his enquiries a man explained that the sea did not come any farther up than Avonmouth, six miles off, and that at Bristol there was only fresh water, that of the river. "Down there," he continued, pointing in the direction, "he would find the sea, and all the big ocean-going ships."

It was too late to go there that evening, so Stephen took a bed for the night at a lodging-house near the river. He thought he could afford the expense (only fourpence, and sixpence for his supper), as he felt certain he would be hired next day to go on some ship. As soon as it was light he started, after a hasty breakfast, for Avonmouth. Alas! when he arrived, he met with another disappointment. The sea was nothing but an expanse of brown, muddy water. Could the artist of the picture have mistaken the colour, he wondered?

Round the public-houses near the harbour he soon fell in with groups of men whose appearance unmistakably proclaimed them to be sailors. To them he was drawn by an irresistible fascination. It was such men as these who had filled his boyish dreams. A closer acquaintance with them, however, brought some disillusion with it. Early in the day as it was, many of them had already managed to get

into a pretty far advanced state of intoxication, and their language was none of the choicest, though their loose blue garments, glazed hats, and pigtails, their rollicking gaiety, and evident good-fellowship, made some amends for the loss of his ideal.

Timidly, Stephen endeavoured to get into conversation with some of those who appeared still sober enough to talk rationally, and he soon found out that the quickest way to win their good graces was by offering them something to drink. Low as was the state of his funds he decided to make the venture. Three glasses of hot rum and water were called for, two of which he offered to a couple of hearty-looking tars, the other he determined to drink himself, in the interests of good comradeship.

His guests instantly became quite friendly, and answered all his questions with a fluency and an elaboration which astonished him, though more than half their sea-jargon was quite incomprehensible. He felt unable to judge whether or not they were "quizzing" him, as doubtless they were, his evident ignorance of seafaring matters being too great a temptation.

At length, warmed with courage by the hot grog, Stephen ventured to take them into his confidence, and tell them how greatly he longed to go to sea. A roar of laughter rang through the bar parlour.

"What! you, a ploughboy, would like to go to sea!" Stephen was still wearing his smock-frock, leggings, and heavy boots. "Well, that is good! Too good to keep! Mates, here's a chaw-bacon wants to turn shell-back!"

All the other sailors joined the chorus of laughter.

Then a gray-bearded old sailor, who was contemplatively smoking in a corner, with his glass of grog before him, had pity on him.

"Lad," he said, "have you any idea what a sailor's life

is like? Maybe you think that it's nothing but standing about with folded arms, on the deck of a fine ship, spanking before a favouring wind. If so, you're muchly mistaken. You don't know the drudgery and hardships which we poor fellows have to put up with, the bad grub, sometimes short commons, and, what's perhaps worse than all, the tyranny of the officers. Take my advice, and give up them foolish notions of yourn. It's been well and often said that nobody but fools go to sea."

The other sailors joined in the conversation, all of them corroborating the old man's views. They declared it to be but a dog's life at the best, and most of them said that if they could get out of it they would never sail again. Deep was the disappointment, and terrible the agitation, of Stephen on hearing these words. What! was it for this that he had run away from home, causing his mother such anxiety? Was the fabric of romance he had woven to be so completely destroyed as to leave not a shred?

Still greater was his trouble when the men went on to explain that, even if he would not take their word, but would persist in going to find out for himself, he could not get the chance, for no one would take an inexperienced clodhopper, who, by his own admission, had only seen the sea for the first time that morning. In a very dejected frame of mind was Stephen, as he gloomily trudged back to Bristol in the afternoon. In his pocket there remained but a few coppers, for the sailors had been very ready to drink his health, and the landlord equally ready to accept their orders as long as he saw that the lad had a shilling.

What was he to do now? Where could he go? Should he put his pride in his pocket, and go back to the farm? If, indeed, he were to accept that alternative, which he certainly did not feel inclined to do, it would be a difficult task. Even if he were to try the Irishman's method, dis-

graceful as it was, could he succeed in making his way on the road? And then, if he did go back, what a life could he expect to lead with Ebenezer Herrick!

"No," he finally said to himself, fingering the few remaining coppers in his pocket. "As I have made my bed, so must I lie upon it. Bed! As to the luxury of having a bed at all to-night, I shall have to choose between that and the necessity of having a breakfast. Food is more important than sleep just now, so I must pass the night as best I can."

He wandered disconsolately through Bristol streets until a late hour, when all the shops were shut and the city given up to darkness. Wearily he dragged himself along, looking for a shelter from the cold drizzling rain, which now began to fall steadily. Being unacquainted with the place, he did not know which way to turn, and at length found himself completely lost in the maze. He was attracted suddenly, upon turning a corner, by a blaze of light at a little distance, which appeared likely to give some hope of warmth. Making his way to it, he found that the light emanated from a bright fire of coals in an iron basket standing in the midst of an open square. Round about he could see rows of carts piled high with cabbages and other vegetables. He had, in fact, found his way into the vegetable market.

Near the fire stood a coffee-stall, at which several men were refreshing themselves. Cold and hungry, he could not resist the temptation to join them. He found that he was amongst carmen and market porters. The thought at once occurred to him, "Why should not I take up work like this? I must earn my living somehow,"—so he asked one of the men if there was any chance of getting a job. Fortunately for him, some of the regular hands had not turned up that night, and he was taken on, as a temporary worker, to help in unloading the carts.

By seven in the morning the work was over, and the few shillings he received in payment appeared quite a godsend to him, being enough to provide food and shelter, in a lodging-house near the market, for that day. Greatly reassured by this good luck, he again applied for work on the following night, and as readily obtained it; the market people saw that he was a strong and willing worker, and he soon became recognized as a regular hand.

CHAPTER VI

A CHANCE AT LAST

FOR some weeks Stephen continued to work regularly in the market. But though he earned enough to keep him from want, and to obtain some degree of comfort, he could never for a moment think of this occupation as other than a stop-gap. In his heart of hearts he longed constantly and piningly for the sea, in spite of all he had heard against it from the sailors.

His work in the market was over early in the morning, leaving him at liberty to spend the rest of the day as he chose. His choice was always to spend it by the ships, and amongst seafaring men. Strong and active, he thought nothing of the journey down to Avonmouth, where he sought the company of sailors as much as possible, and got them to tell him of their experiences, drinking in their yarns with eager interest.

He soon found out, however, that, as the sailors had said, it was by no means easy to get taken on to a ship. His costume and evident lack of experience were against him. He learned that it was customary for apprentices to pay

a premium, or at least that some little "palm-oil" in the way of bonus would be necessary to secure the interest of those who had the power of securing berths on board; but, alas! his daily earnings were just barely sufficient to pay for his maintenance, so that constant disappointments almost drove him to despair.

One day he was making the journey to Avonmouth once more, unable to keep away from his beloved sea. He was accompanied by a little fox-terrier which he had picked up as it wandered, apparently ownerless, in the market. In his forlorn position he was glad to have any companionship, even that of a dumb animal, so he and Fido soon became inseparable friends.

A rabbit sprang out on the roadside from a thicket as they passed. Fido pricked up his ears, and at once started in pursuit, following it right amongst the bushes. Suddenly Stephen heard the dog utter a sharp frightened cry, and immediately after he could hear his barks, apparently coming from beneath the ground.

Greatly alarmed, Stephen at once rushed into the thicket, pushing the branches aside in search of his pet. Not a trace of him could he discover, though that he was not far off was evident by the sound of his barking, which now appeared to come from underneath his feet. Hurrying onward in bewilderment, Stephen tripped over some boards lying on the ground, one of which had broken in half from mere rottenness, leaving an opening through which the dog must have fallen. Excitedly he pushed the planks to one side, when there was revealed an opening apparently leading to some subterranean passage. It led almost vertically downwards, but a steep ladder stood against one side of the pit.

Thinking only of the distressed position of his dog, Stephen unhesitatingly rushed to the bottom of the shaft. There he was met by Fido, who expressed his satisfaction

by excited yelps and caresses. Reassured as to the dog's safety, Stephen now looked round curiously to see what sort of a place he had come upon. A passage, almost horizontal, was before him, at the end of which he saw a glimmer of daylight. Advancing cautiously he soon arrived at the end of the passage, and found himself in a lofty and roomy cave, which apparently was lighted from some opening above.

At once Stephen concluded that he had stumbled upon some disused and forgotten storehouse of smugglers, who had long been driven from this part of the coast. This supposition was confirmed by his discovering many fragments of cases and barrel staves strewn over the floor. That the solitude had been undisturbed for years was also evident from the amount of dust which coated them. In a corner stood a triangle of rusty iron bars, from the apex of which depended an equally rusty chain and a moulderling pot. Below were the remains of charred embers. The blackened walls above showed that smoke had often passed over them.

"Well, this is a lucky find, Fido, old boy!" exclaimed Stephen, "here at least is a shelter for us. I shall be able to save the sum I have been paying for lodgings."

His first thought, disregarding all romance of the situation and its associations, and flying only to the practical end he had in view, was that of raising money for a bonus. He decided to tell no one of his discovery, but to take up his abode in the cave. Next day he brought some candles, a flint and steel, and a tinder-box, and soon he was comfortably installed in his new quarters. There was enough wood left in the cave to serve him as fuel for some time. From the neighbouring hill-slopes he gathered some armfuls of ferns from which to make a bed. Food he brought with him daily when he left the market. Water he had in

abundance from a rill flowing down the hillside. Thus he passed some weeks.

It was his custom at night to stroll down to the landing-place near Avonmouth, always with the idea of meeting seafaring men to talk with.

One dark night, when thus promenading without special object, he was startled by the sound of shouts, and a noise which indicated that a severe struggle was going on somewhere close at hand. Guided by the sound, he made his way rapidly towards the scene of the excitement. As he neared it he heard cries of "The Press-gang! the Press-gang!" and he understood at once the meaning of it all. Evidently a party of man-of-war's men had been prowling round with the object of forcibly recruiting their crew, as was then frequently done, and were endeavouring to make prey of some seafaring men they had come upon. Stephen could hear the officer in charge swearing loudly, though in a somewhat bibulous manner, as he urged his men to keep hold of the unlucky mariners they had come across.

Just as he got near, three men rushed up, almost knocking him over in their haste to escape.

"Where shall we make for?" he heard one cry. "These fellows are bound to find us if we hide anywhere close by."

Struck with compassionate sympathy, Stephen called out:

"Come on, I'll show you a safe place!"

"Who on earth are you?" queried the men.

"A friend of sailors," answered Stephen. "Don't stop to ask questions, but follow at once, or you will be caught."

A glimpse of moonlight enlightened the scene, and revealed Stephen to the fugitives.

"Come on, men," cried one, "he is only a lad; he can't do much against us if he wanted to;" and they readily followed their would-be succourer. Stephen led them swiftly

to his cave, where, gasping for breath, they lay down to recover themselves. By the light of the candle Stephen was able to dimly observe the men he had rescued. One was evidently an officer, as was manifest by his dress and bearing. He was about thirty-eight years of age, well-knit, of strong, clear-cut features and swarthy complexion. The others were apparently sailors of the crew belonging to his ship.

“Close shave that, boys,” remarked the officer.

“That it was, cappen,” said the men, thereby confirming Stephen’s supposition and indicating their relative positions.

“Of course,” resumed the captain, “I would have got off right enough in the morning, as they cannot press officers; but it might have meant a night in the calaboose, and perhaps some rough treatment from that drunken lieutenant, and his equally drunken squad. It would have gone hard with you, boys.”

“Indade it would, sor,” said one of the sailors, a short, red-haired, jovial-looking fellow, whose accent strongly reminded Stephen of his quondam companion, Dan Maguire.

“It’s a michty shame,” said the other sailor, who was a tall, gaunt man of about forty, with a fair goatee beard. “Why canna they let us alone? That way o’ getting men for the navy is against baith common sense and justice, as I could show by mony arguments.”

“That will do, Sandy,” said the captain. “You Scotch-men are terribly disputatious, but now isn’t the time to talk, we’ve got to think out how to get off to our ship. The wind has changed to a favourable slant, and we must, if possible, set sail in the morning.”

The captain then turned to Stephen.

“I must thank you heartily,” he said, “for getting us out of a nasty scrape, and you may rely upon me for lending you a hand if I can do anything for you in return.”

Like a flash, Stephen saw that his chance had come at last.

"The greatest favour you can do me, captain," he replied, "would be to take me off with you to your ship."

The captain gazed upon him with surprise and with evident suspicion.

"That's all very well," he said, "for you to propose, but I don't ship men without knowing something about them. I don't mean to be too inquisitive, but what can I know about you? I come across you prowling round the shore. I find that you have evidently taken up your quarters in what looks for all the world like an old smuggler's hiding-place, and you are eager to get away. How do I know that you hav'n't broken out of jail somewhere, and are now trying to escape from justice? Excuse me, my lad, you have done me a good turn and I am grateful, but you see how things look yourself, don't you?"

Stephen blushed to the roots of his hair; he could see the force of the captain's remarks.

"Captain," he said, after a pause, "will you allow me to tell you my story? I will not take long, and you will not lose much time, as you must stay here awhile to let that press-gang get well out of the way. Meantime let me offer you some refreshment, of which you must stand in need after your hard race."

So saying he produced a bottle of rum that he had provided himself with for emergencies. The men's eyes sparkled.

"All right, my lad!" said the captain, as he seized the pannikin which Stephen tendered to him; "spin your yarn, but don't draw it out too long."

As briefly as possible Stephen told his story, and he saw with satisfaction that he was producing a favourable impression on his audience.

"Your name is Herrick, you said," ejaculated the Scotch sailor. "I once knew a man named Roger Herrick, who was mate of the *Flying Fish*, in the West India trade, when I was an apprentice. Are ye any relation o' his, think ye?"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Stephen, "he was my father. Tell me of him, tell me of him!"

"No time for more palaver now, boys," exclaimed the captain; "let's be off, you can finish your yarn when we get on board."

So saying, they started for the landing-place.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE GOOD SHIP *ADVENTURE*

IT was arranged on the way that Stephen should go in advance to reconnoitre, since, if the press-gang was still lingering about, he, a landsman in a smock-frock, ran little chance of being seized. If he found the coast clear, he was to give a signal by whistling in a prearranged manner. The name of the ship, the captain informed him, was the *Adventure*, and the boat should be at anchor a few yards from the shore in charge of a boy, who would bring it into the wharf upon hearing the cry, "*Adventure*, ahoy!"

This programme was duly carried out. The captain and his men, upon approaching the coast, hid behind some bushes. Stephen went on, and having ascertained that the press-gang had gone away, hailed the boat and signalled to the captain. By the time they arrived at the beach, the boy had got up the anchor and sculled to the wharf. The poor lad had been nearly frightened out of his wits by the

noise of the struggle with the press-gang, and the long absence of the captain.

“Seen anything of Bill and Jack?” asked the captain of the boy.

“No!”

“Then I guess they have got them; but let’s give them a chance. Sing out for them, one of you!”

“Ahoy, Bill Johnson! ahoy, Jack Jones!” shouted one of the sailors.

No reply coming after repeated shouting, the captain said: “It’s no use waiting longer, we’ll have to go without them. Tumble in, lads, and shove off!”

The two men took their places at the oars, the boy went to the bow, and Stephen, upon a sign given by the captain, took his place in the stern-sheets.

The pull was a long one, for the *Adventure*, as the captain explained, was lying at anchor amongst a fleet of West Indiamen in the King’s Roads. They had been wind-bound for more than a week, but now that the wind had changed, they hoped to get off in the morning. Soon they were amongst the fleet, and Stephen was much struck with what appeared to him the majestic proportions of the vessels. He wondered how the captain could manage to steer the boat direct to his own ship.

Presently the captain cried:

“Easy all! vast oars! boat-hook out!” and they steered alongside of a large vessel. A rope-ladder with wooden steps hung over the side. Up this the captain swarmed, followed quickly by Stephen, who then for the first time put his foot on the deck of a ship.

It was too dark for Stephen to see what sort of a craft he had come on board; nor was he allowed any time for observation, as the captain told him to follow him aft, and made direct for a bright light shining from what Stephen

soon discovered to be the door leading to the principal cabin, or "cuddy" as it was then styled.

Stepping over a high combing, they found themselves in a short passage, with the steward's pantry on one side, and what appeared to be a sleeping-cabin on the other. This led to the cabin, which, to the inexperienced eyes of Stephen, appeared quite a grand saloon. In the middle was a long table, on each side of which was a fixed bench upholstered with horsehair cloth, and fitted with a mahogany swing-back rest. The two sides of the room were formed of wooden partitions, in which were doors leading to several private cabins. Round the farther end, following the horseshoe form of the stern, was a series of lockers with horsehair cushions, forming a species of sofa. At the end of the table stood a stove. Looking up, Stephen saw that the roof was formed by the beams supporting the poop-deck, above which rose a domed skylight. Suspended over the table from one of the beams was a swinging lamp. From another beam hung a large tin parrot-cage. Attached to a third was a mariner's compass. All the woodwork was painted white.

At the table three men sat chatting, dressed in the style customary amongst ship's officers at the time.

"You have been longer than you expected, sir," said one of them, addressing the captain.

"Yes, Mr. Roberts, and but for the help of this lad," said the captain, pointing to Stephen, "I should have been a good bit longer; nearly got nipped by a press-gang. As it is, they've got Bill Johnson and Jack Jones, worse luck!"

Stephen was then introduced to the officers by the formality of the captain giving their name and rank, as he indicated each with a wave of his hand.

"Mr. Roberts, chief officer; Mr. Wright, third officer; Mr. Carter, supercargo and purser. Ah! I had forgotten,

my name is Captain Sommers. Mr. Hargreaves and Mr. Wainwright, the second and fourth officers, are now on watch on deck."

"I guess, Herrick," continued the captain, "you are now pretty well played out, so after some refreshment you can turn in upon one of these lockers," pointing to the semi-circular bench at the stern. "The steward will bring you a blanket and pillow. To-morrow I will arrange about your quarters and your rating on board, and you will get a sea rig-out from the slop-chest. You can't go on wearing a smock on board ship."

Soon a plentiful supper was placed on the table, and having done full justice to it, the captain and Stephen both "turned in".

At daybreak next morning Stephen was awakened by the noise of many footsteps tramping overhead. He found the cabin empty, and immediately sought the deck, where a picturesque sight met his view.

It was one of those mornings, rare in November, when the sun had risen brightly over an almost cloudless sky, illuminating the Welsh hills on the right and the rocky Devonshire coast on the left, whilst the spires of Bristol and the white houses of Avonmouth could be easily discerned over the ship's stern, and each ripple of the water reflected a glint of light. The air felt exhilarating, and the movement all around added animation to the scene.

The whole fleet was busy weighing anchor. From the forepart of the *Adventure*, and from every ship near, came the regular "clink, clink" of the windlass pauls, and the choruses of the heaving-songs loudly vociferated by the men. Sails were being loosened, and hung in festoons till they were sheeted home in response to the orders shrilly piped or hoarsely roared by the boatswains. On the poop, or raised after-deck, of each ship stood the captains and

junior officers, the chief officers superintending the anchor-heaving from the topgallant forecastle.

Captain Sommers was too busy with his duties to give Stephen more than a hasty nod in response to his salute, but on the poop he met with Mr. Carter, the supercargo, who at this stage of the voyage was an "idler". He received Stephen kindly, and, entering into conversation, pointed out many things which, in the lad's ignorance of nautical affairs, would otherwise have escaped his attention.

"Yes, all these vessels are West Indiamen, going out under the convoy of those two frigates over there," pointing out two ships which even a landsman's eye could see were men-of-war, His Majesty's ships *Swiftsure* and *Hero*.

"There are too many French privateers about at present for merchantmen to do without such an escort."

"Anchor's apeak, sir!" shouted the chief officer.

"Sheets home!" cried the captain in response.

A rush of men to the belaying-pins, ropes cast off, then pulled taut with many a "Yo heave oh!" and soon the ship is under way, with the white sails bellying to a favourable breeze.

One frigate takes the lead, the merchantmen following in close order, and the other man-of-war brings up the rear.

A beautiful sight, this setting forth of a fleet, whether seen from the shore or from the deck. Busily the crew are engaged, catting the anchor, lashing the boats, coiling the ropes, and putting all things "ship-shape and Bristol fashion".

"Now that we have started, we'd better put you into seafaring trim also," said Mr. Carter; "so come down with me to the store-room."

"The captain has not yet told me what rating you are to have," continued the supercargo, when they had the "slop-chest" open before them, "but I presume that he means

you to live aft, and so I shall serve out to you a junior officer's outfit."

When Stephen had thrown off his rustic dress and donned his nautical suit, quite a transformation was wrought in him. No one would have thought from his appearance that he had not been brought up at sea. Nor, though the ship was now rolling considerably, did he feel the slightest symptoms of sea-sickness. There is something in heredity after all.

Returning to the deck with Mr. Carter, he now began to take more close observation of the ship upon which he had so suddenly embarked, the supercargo aiding him by his explanations. The *Adventure* was a vessel of considerable size for that time, 400 tons burden, Mr. Carter informed him. She was modelled upon the roomy lines in vogue in those days, wide in the beam, bluff-bowed, with raised poop and topgallant forecastle. High bulwarks protected the waist, and she was ship-rigged.

Six carronades on slides stood on the main-deck, and twelve-pounder bow and stern chasers were placed on the forecastle and poop. Round the masts stood muskets in racks and cutlasses in stands below the break of the poop. In these times of war no merchantman went to sea without such accessories, as seamen never knew when they might be called upon to defend their ship.

The crew, as they mustered on the main-deck to be divided into watches, numbered about sixty men, and a fine lot of fellows they looked.

There was no need to repeat the summons when the steward announced, at eight bells, that breakfast was on the table. The fresh sea-air had sharpened all appetites.

The meal over, the captain asked Mr. Carter and Stephen to remain in the saloon, as he wished to talk to them. He put a few questions to Stephen with regard to his edu-

cational attainments, and then said, "I think the best position I can put you in will be that of clerk or assistant to the supercargo, who will require some help by and by. Mr. Carter will instruct you in your duties, and enter your name in the ship's books."

This was a satisfactory arrangement, as Stephen, from his inexperience, would have been of little use in any other department. It also promised to leave him some leisure in which he could pick up nautical knowledge.

Returning to the deck, for he could never stay long out of sight of the sea, Stephen eagerly watched all that was going on, and everything being so novel, he found unending sources of interest, whilst he seemed to learn the meaning of each operation as if by instinct.

In the afternoon Mr. Carter assigned him a berth in one of the cabins, and then inducted him to his office; giving him manifests and other papers to copy, which he did satisfactorily.

CHAPTER VIII

A STORY OF BRITISH ENTERPRISE

UNTIL that evening, so completely had his mind been taken up with the novelty of his surroundings, it had not occurred to Stephen to ask to what country the ship was bound. "We're going to the West Indies, I suppose," said he, appealing to Mr. Carter, "since you told me that all these ships were West Indiamen, but to what part?"

To his surprise, instead of replying directly, the supercargo put on an air of mystery.

"Well," said he, after a pause, "I think that there can be no harm in telling you now, as you are sure to find out

sooner or later; but I must ask you to be discreet, and tell no one until the proper time comes."

Greatly mystified, and with curiosity fully aroused, Stephen replied that his discretion might be relied upon.

"Yes," went on Mr. Carter, evidently pleased to have someone to whom to communicate the news, "we are bound upon a singular expedition, and none but the officers know our real destination. The men for'ard have all been shipped upon an agreement to serve for a voyage 'to the West Indies, the South Seas, or elsewhere as the captain may direct', for a period of one year or more. To get them to join on these terms, we had, of course, to offer them some inducement, and all the crew will, according to the articles, be entitled to a share in the profits of the voyage over and above their wages. We offered a good bonus on their signing on, and had no difficulty in getting as many men as we wanted; for 'Jack' as a rule is a reckless fellow, thinking only of present enjoyment, and I believe, if one offered enough, he could fill a ship with sailors, even if she had only bare ribs and was bound for 'Davy Jones's locker'. That is why we were able to pick out good men and to take a larger number than usual. The *Adventure* has been in the regular West India trade for years, and none of us expected, when we arrived home from our last voyage in October, but that we would now be on our regular course. However, one day Captain Sommers and I received a message telling us that the owners, Messrs. Blount & Co., of Bristol, wished to see us at the office at once. When we got there we found the partners in a state of great excitement. 'We have sent to consult with you, gentlemen,' said the head of the house, 'upon a project we have been thinking over seriously in the last few days, since we value your opinion as old servants of the house, and we shall require your aid in carrying it out'.

“The captain and I intimated that we were all attention. “‘You must know’, went on Mr. John Blount, senior, in his stately manner, ‘that some remarkable events have recently occurred in South America, of which you, being on the sea at the time, could have no means of hearing. You are aware, of course, that the whole of South and Central America, and Mexico as well, are held by Spain as colonies, and though the richness of these countries and the great harvest of trade which could be gathered there have long attracted British merchants, we have been unable to avail ourselves of them, because the Spanish colonial system strictly prohibits them from trading with any country but Spain. Now, so long as England was on friendly terms with Spain, we could not well disregard the laws of that kingdom without incurring a greater responsibility than we cared to risk. But since Spain had the temerity to form an alliance with France against us, and to send her fleet, in company with that of France, to attack us—which attempt was, thank God, frustrated last year by the gallantry of Lord Nelson at Trafalgar—our Government considers that we are in actual hostilities with that country. It was, therefore, open to any English house to send out vessels to trade with the Spanish colonies. My junior partners here frequently suggested that we might make the venture, but I am rather old-fashioned—and cautious, and thought that we had better wait till we saw a good opportunity. That opportunity appears now to have come.’

“The captain and I pricked up our ears, eagerly waiting to hear what was to follow; but the old gentleman was not to be hurried, and after taking a pinch of snuff he proceeded:

“‘You may remember, Captain Sommers, for you were in England at the time, that last year news came of some Spanish galleons, which were captured at the mouth of the

river Plate by an English squadron under Captain Moore, who took booty from them amounting to over two millions sterling. Then another squadron, under Commodore Sir Home Popham, sailed upon a secret expedition, which everybody thought was going in the same direction. It turned out, however, that the Government had another purpose in view, namely, that of taking the Cape of Good Hope settlements from the Dutch. Well, it appears that this expedition found their task quite easy, since the Dutch gave in after a single fight of little importance. Such an easy victory seems quite to have disappointed Commodore Popham and Sir David Baird, the general in command of the troops, though I confess I cannot see why.'

"'Ah!' broke in young John Blount, who is rather a sporting character, 'but I can. It is easy to see how such fellows as Popham, who is a brave and gallant man, though he makes himself ridiculous sometimes by his awful boasting, and Sir David Baird, 'the tiger of Seringapatam', would be simply spoiling for a fight. What do such men as these care for the causes or the political effects of a war? It's the fighting they love for mere fighting's sake.'

"'John,' said the old gentleman testily, 'pray, don't interrupt me. As I was saying, it appears that an American ship-captain arrived at the Cape just about this time, and told Sir Home Popham that there was a splendid chance for him if he cared to make a dash at Buenos Ayres. The Spaniards, that captain said, had made themselves so odious to the natives (though most of them were of Spanish descent) by their arrogance and oppression, their only idea being to wring as much money as they could out of the colony, that the colonists would not raise a finger to help the mother-country. As Spain itself was in such a state of decrepitude, owing to internal revolts and the intrigues of France, it could not send any troops to

support its authority, and, moreover, the Spanish fleet had been completely destroyed by Lord Nelson.

“‘Tidings such as these were too much for the equanimity of such a daring man as Commodore Popham. So without waiting for the authorization of the Government, he decided at once to take upon himself the responsibility, and make a raid on the Spanish colonies, assuming, no doubt, that success would justify him in the eyes of his superiors. So it appears that he set out at once with only five men-of-war and five transports, carrying about twelve hundred soldiers, including officers, upon his daring expedition. Nobody in England heard anything about this until the arrival of the frigate *Narcissus* in the Thames a few weeks ago with despatches from Major-general Beresford, the commander of the troops.

“‘The news brought in these despatches sent a thrill through England such as had not been experienced since the glorious news of Trafalgar. They told how General Beresford had landed, on the 25th of June, a little to the south of Buenos Ayres, with only about sixteen hundred men, and marched upon the city. How, next morning at daybreak, they met the Spanish forces, which had come out during the night to defend the place; and though the latter had taken up a very strong position, they were unable to withstand the impetuous rush of the English, who drove them from their position at the point of the bayonet, and across a small river which forms the southern boundary of Buenos Ayres, after less than an hour’s fighting; the Spaniards leaving behind them, in their precipitate flight, three cannons, and a large quantity of small-arms which the men threw away as they ran. The enemy blew up or burned the bridges over this river, the Riachuelo, as it is named, but that did not stop our gallant troops, as during the night they kept hard at work making rafts, using the

timbers from the adjoining houses, and tying them together with strings of raw hide. Next morning it was seen that the opposite bank of the river was lined with Spanish troops, but a few volleys from our men raised quite a panic amongst them, and they broke and fled without waiting for the English to get across. It was then an easy business to ferry our troops over, when they immediately formed up and marched on the town.

“‘Soon they saw a Spanish officer, evidently of high rank, riding to meet them with two troopers as escort, one of them bearing a flag of truce, and were astounded to find that he was an emissary from the commandant of the fort, from which they were then more than two miles away, asking for terms of surrender. The officer told them that the Spanish governor, the Marquis of Sobremonte, had been so terrified that he had fled inland during the night with a few followers, taking with him the contents of the treasury, which filled several large carts with gold and silver. The officer asked that the garrison should be allowed to march out with the honours of war. General Beresford, gallant Irishman as he is, was not likely to accept such a proposal, especially when he saw that the enemy was in such a state of ‘funk’. So he briefly told the officer to go back and tell his commandant that he would see about arranging terms after he had taken possession of the place. He at once ordered the troops to advance. They marched through the streets without meeting the slightest resistance, the people standing at their doors, gaping at them with complete surprise, almost paralysed at their audacity when they saw how few they were in number. They marvelled what sort of men they could be, especially when they saw the 71st Highlanders, who led the van, in a uniform more outlandish than they could have imagined, and heard the unearthly music of the

bagpipes. Following them came about four hundred blue-jackets and marines, and a few companies of artillery wound up the rear.

“When they reached the fort they found the doors open, and learned that the garrison had fled helter-skelter out of the place when they heard the English were coming. A perfect roar of laughter went through the ranks at the cowardice of the ‘Dons’. Never could such an easy victory have been anticipated. Great was the enthusiasm of the troops when General Beresford, having formed them into square in the central court of the fort, ordered the British flag to be hoisted amidst the cheers of the men and the strains of ‘God Save the King’.

“Addressing the troops, General Beresford reminded them that it was in that very month, two hundred and twenty-six years before, in June, 1580, that the Spanish flag had been first raised over that very spot by Juan de Garay; “but now,” said he, “it is replaced by our grand old flag, and we hope it will wave there for ever!”

“Having set the guards, the troops were broken off, and immediately the inhabitants came in, offering them refreshments of all kinds, with the idea of securing the good-will of their captors, regarding whose ferocity they had heard such terrible tales from the Spaniards. Presently a deputation of the leading citizens arrived, headed by the trembling mayor, and offered General Beresford a large sum of money if he would spare their lives and their property.

“Their crouching terror almost took the gallant general’s breath away. He told them to go home and he would soon let them know what he intended to do.

“That afternoon the people were surprised beyond measure upon reading a manifesto which the general ordered to be stuck up on the cabildo (town-house). In it he announced that he had taken possession of the country in the name of

His Britannic Majesty, but that no one would be molested who did not take up arms against the British. All Spanish troops would be allowed the honours of war if they laid down their arms and surrendered as prisoners of war; all the native militia might return to their homes if they would take the oath of allegiance to King George; no one would be obliged to take up arms against His Most Catholic Majesty of Spain. All private and ecclesiastical property would be respected. The local authorities would retain their offices, and the clergy their benefices. No fresh taxes would be imposed. Every respect would be paid to religion and private rights. Any private property made use of would be paid for, but the property of the Spanish crown must be handed over to the British general.

“The people could hardly believe their eyes, so different was this treatment from what they expected, and a general feeling of relief, and even of friendliness to the new-comers, pervaded the town.

“But the general had not forgotten about the treasure. As soon as the ceremony of hoisting the flag was over he sent off a detachment of only thirty men, such was his contempt for the Spaniards that he did not think they would show fight, even in defence of their money.

“It happened just as he imagined, for the guards ran away as soon as the British came up to them, and in a few days the troops were once more roused into tremendous enthusiasm by seeing the treasure-carts come back under the escort of their comrades.

“When counted, it was found that their booty amounted to 1,086,208 dollars, or about £300,000 in gold and silver.

“In his despatch to the Government, Sir Home Popham has waxed eloquent over this feat of British arms. You know that he is notorious for his boasting and high-flown style, but this time there seems to be some ground for his

raptures. He points out that with a handful of men we have captured a city of some sixty thousand inhabitants, occupying several square miles. But that is not all; he has added to the British dominions a territory covering over a million square miles, abounding in every kind of natural wealth. Vast herds of cattle roam upon its plains, its possibilities for agriculture are enormous, while its mineral riches are said to be fabulous. 'At length,' he says, 'we have taken the famous El Dorado, so long sought for.' He tells how vast rivers penetrate this domain, navigable for two thousand miles, to the very heart of the South American continent.

"He adds that the inhabitants are most anxious to trade with us, being tired of the restrictions so long imposed by Spain, and that he, General Beresford, and all the other officers are being most hospitably entertained by the leading colonial families.

"You may imagine,' continued Mr. Blount, 'what a sensation was caused in London upon the publication of these despatches. The lord mayor immediately proclaimed a public holiday for the reception of the victors. Never was there such a scene as that of the procession from the *Narcissus* at the docks up to the Bank of England to deposit the treasure. The crowds were greater than on lord mayor's day. First came a detachment of marines, then followed a string of five wagons, each marked 'Treasure' in large letters, and drawn by six horses. The first was surmounted by the royal banner of Spain, which had been taken from the fort of Buenos Ayres. The following ones bore small flags with the inscriptions 'Popham', 'Beresford', 'Buenos Ayres', and 'Victory'. Behind the convoy came the blue-jackets dragging the three cannons captured in the first fight.

"The streets rang with cheers for Beresford, Popham, and the glory of Old England.

“‘It would have been foolish,’ concluded Mr. Blount, ‘and not in accordance with the traditions of Bristol adventurers, had we neglected to take advantage of such an opportunity as this; so we decided that we would send out the *Adventure* on her next voyage to the river Plate. This is what I have sent for you, gentlemen, to tell you. Of course,’ he added, ‘it is open to you to decline to go, but in that case I do not think we shall have much difficulty in finding another commander and officers. We have thought that it would only be fair that everyone who took part in the expedition should share in its profits, so that on behalf of the firm I can promise you that, should you decide to go, you will probably receive a substantial bonus in addition to your wages.’

“Captain Sommers and I without hesitation expressed our willingness to join the expedition. The story we had just heard naturally fired our curiosity and enthusiasm. We immediately entered into discussion of the plans.

“‘Of course you will readily see,’ said Mr. Blount, ‘that the success of the venture will, to a very great extent, depend upon keeping our design a secret. Should our competitors get wind of it, they might follow suit, and overload the market out there; so, gentlemen, you must be very discreet. We propose to load the ship with goods such as we think will find a ready sale in the Spanish colonies, under your superintendence, Mr. Carter, as you will have to represent us in disposing of them. Captain Sommers, you will ship your crew for an indefinite period and voyage, and arrange so that the *Adventure*, to avoid suspicion, sails with the regular West Indian fleet.’

“So now you know, Herrick,” concluded Mr. Carter, “where the ship is bound for, and I hope we shall all have good luck.”

The exciting story he had just heard, and thoughts of

the sudden change in his prospects, kept Stephen awake for many hours that night.

CHAPTER IX

“IRISH HOT AND SCOTCH COLD”

NEXT morning, when Stephen came on deck, he found that the ship was sailing along in sight of land, which Mr. Carter informed him, after their mutual salutations, was the south coast of Ireland.

The weather was bright, the sky almost cloudless, and a steady favouring breeze was blowing. It was a glorious sight. The sea was now of a greenish-blue colour, flecked with white foam on the crest of the waves. Around them were the companion ships, each showing a spread of white canvas. The land was so near that the houses, and even the roads and hedgerows dividing the fields, could be discerned. Its general colour was a bright-green, interspersed with patches of a darker hue, almost black, where a bog or patch of trees occurred, and it looked like some vast moving panorama, as the ship sailed on, new aspects constantly presenting themselves.

Stephen was suddenly awakened from his entrancement by the recollection of the Scotch sailor who had spoken to him of his father. The desire to hear more from him immediately drove away all other thoughts. But where was the man to be found?

“Oh! that will be Sandy Fulton, no doubt; one of our A.B.’s,” said Mr. Carter, when Stephen had explained to him his quest. “You will find him for’ard.”

Stephen at once made his way to the fore-part of the

ship, where he was so fortunate as to find the man he was in search of, smoking his pipe in company of the Irishman, who had also been of the party on the previous night, underneath the break of the forecastle.

So transformed was Stephen in his new attire that at first the men did not recognize him.

"Ou aye, laddie," said the Scotchman, when he gathered who was addressing him. "Beg your pardon, sir," as he noticed Stephen's uniform. "I mind fine your speaking to me about Roger Herrick, but really I canna tell you much aboot him. He was mate o' the *Flying Fish*, as I said, when I was apprentice, and as fine a sailor-man as ever walked a deck—liked by everybody. But he left us suné after I joined that vessel. I heard that he had gone as chief mate on board a big ship, the *Bristol Clipper*, bound for the East Indies, an' that's aboot a' I can say."

This was a disappointment to Stephen, but he continued to ply Sandy with questions, which the Scotchman answered as best he could.

"Isn't it a darlin' counthry?" suddenly exclaimed the Irishman, looking at the land. "What would I not give to be ashore there amongst the praties? Och, me own Green Isle!"

"It's a wonner tae me," retorted Sandy, "that ye ever left it, if ye're sae fond o' ye're hame as a' that. Whatever made ye tak' tae the sea, Mick?"

"It was all along o' Father Clancy and Biddy Malone's pig," said Mick.

"Let's hear the story," said Sandy, whilst Stephen stood as an amused listener. "Tell us a' aboot it, man."

"Well, it was like this. I was but a bit of a gossoon in the village of Ballymashanty, County Wexford, helping me mother to look after her pratie-patch; and a hard time we had of it, for me father—rest his sowl!—had been

killed in the rebellion of '98, when he joined the boys in fighting the Sassenachs. Biddy Malone—may the curse o' Crumwell be upon her!—was an ould crone, whose cabin stood nigh the far end o' the village. Och, she was a bad 'un, with a tongue that would shame a Dublin fishwife, and niver the good word for mortal sowl. The folks round-about were all sartin she was a witch, and could cast the evil eye on their bastes if they offended her, and for that reason it's mighty civil they were to her face. They gave her all she liked to ask, and, troth, she wasn't bashful a bit in her demands. But, as you can aisily beleave, it's a terrible hatred they had for her on the quiet, and they would soon have driven her from the place if they hadn't feared her so much. Against the children in particular did she show her spite. It was 'Off wid ye, ye spaldeen!' whenever a boy came near her, as she shook her stick at him.

"Well, the long and the short of it was that some of us gossoons made up our minds to sarve her out when we got the chance, and we often thought of what game we could try.

"Biddy had that year a splendid lump of a pig, just rolling in fat; small's the wonder, for she'd always got plenty to give him, and proud indade she was of him.

"'Be jabbers,' thought I as I was passing her house wan afthernoon, 'what a lark it would be if somewan was to be afther staling that hog!' It happened that night that I had met with some of my chums for a quiet game of pitch-and-toss at the back of Rory O'Connor's smiddy, and I then and there proposed a plan to get aven with ould Biddy. The boys were uproarious in their approval, and all wanted to take part in it, but I chose only four to help—Dennis M'Manus, Pat O'Shaughnessy, Phil Conlan, and Andy Murphy.

"The plan was to take Biddy's pig away from the sty somehow, so as to give her a big fright, as she would

belave that it was stolen. Now, a pig's a baste that you can't drive, at laste not aisily, so we concluded that we would have to carry it. So the next day we went into the woods and cut a long pole, and got together some bits o' rope, and after it was dark that night we crept up behind Biddy Malone's cabin, and, jumping into the sty, laid hold of 'grumpy'.

"Of coors the cratur squealed like mad as soon as we began to handle him, and roused up ould Biddy, who tried to get at us; but, as I should have said before, we had taken care to fasten the cabin-door first of all. She began to make a hullabaloo, but it wasn't no use, for she might have screamed 'Blue Murther!' before anywan would come nigh the ould witch's cabin afther dark. So, in spite of his squeals, we soon had Master Pig's feet tied together, and him slung from the pole, back downward, and off we set.

"'What will we do wid him now?' said Dennis.

"I had never given a thought to that.

"'Sure,' said Andy, 'we had better give the cratur a bath; ould Biddy's sty is none o' the clanest.'

"'Hurroo!' cried we all; 'let's to the horse-pond wid him.'

"So off we went, and, untying his feet, threw him in wid a splash, 'shooing' him to make him swim to the other side. Then we slunk quietly home, expecting that he would be found on the common or some of the fields all right next morning.

"You may guess that I felt rather queer when, the forenoon after, Father Clancy stopped me and said: 'What's this I hear, Mick Scanlon, that you and some other oma-douhns have been afther killing Biddy Malone's pig?'

"'Me, your riverince, sure an' I know nothing about it!'

"'It's no use, Mick,' said he, 'trying on that game wid me, for I know more than ye think.' An' he looked at me wid his sharp eyes, which seemed to see through me.

“‘Well, your riverince, since you know so much, I may as well own up that me and some of the boys had a bit of a lark last night, to try to get aven wid the ould crone. You know yourself what a plague she is.’

“Father Clancy seemed like to laugh, but then he suddenly looked solemn and said:

“‘That was all very well, but what need was there to kill the poor baste? That was going a bit too far.’

“‘What do ye mane, your riverince?’

“And then it came out that the pig had been found on the edge of the pond that morning, wid its throat cut.

“Well, now, it puzzled me sore as to how that could have happened, for I knew that all the boys had gone home straight to bed when I did. But suddenly I rimimbered what a drover had once tould me, that a pig cuts his own throat when it tries to swim. He was in the pig trade from Cork to England and ought to know. You see, that when the crater gets into the wather, it naturally strikes out wid its fore-feet, but, owing to the construction of the animal, its sharp hoofs come agin its neck, and tears it to bits. But I rather feared that the eddication of the people of Ballymashanty wasn’t enough to learn them this fact in nat’ral history, and that I would get the blame of killing the pig; an’ to hurt a pig is a mighty serious crime in our parts. I tried to explain the matther to Father Clancy, but his riverince looked black as thunder, thin he said:

“‘What you say is all stuff and nonsense, and only proves your guilt. Come round to my house this afternoon, an’ I’ll put the proper penance upon you, an’ think yourself mighty lucky if there isn’t a constable there waiting for you.’

“You may guess I felt scared out of my wits, and I begun to think also that ould Biddy must really be something of a witch. How else could they have known that I

had been there? So I run home to my mother at once, an' tould her all about it. She had a fright as well, an' said I had better go into hidings for a while. That was just my idea. So I started off that very day, instid of going down to see his riverince. Mother gave me some bread, and I was in such a hurry to get away that I run along the road and tramped on till I got to Cork. There I managed to stow myself away on one of the colliers that run to Scotland. They found me out pretty soon, and made me work hard for my passage, so hard that I left the boat as soon as it got over to the Clyde. ‘The best thing I can do,’ thought I to myself, ‘will be to ship in a big ship to Ameriky, and there maybe I’ll make a fortune, and be able to come back, and help me poor ould mother.’ I was lucky enough to get a berth, and it happens that I’ve stuck to the sea iver since. I hav’n’t made my fortune yit, but afther all I can’t say but that I like the life.””

“I thocht,” said Sandy, after the story was finished, “that it mun ha’ been something extraordinar’ tae mak’ an Irishman gang tae sea. Your countrymen, Mick, dinna seem to be cut oot for sailors. Mony’s the lauch I hae had owre stories o’ Irishmen who hae tried to be sailors. I’ve min’ o’ yin, for example, whom the captain o’ a vessel I was in shipped at Cork, being at the time very short-handed and gled to get onyboddy. But this fellow said he kent a’ aboot the sea, so he was taken on. He was up on the forecastle just as we were getting doon the Cove, when the skipper cries till him, ‘Let go that jib!’ but deil a movement did he mak’. Again the captain shouted, ‘Let go that jib, I tell ye!’ when Pat turned round coolly, and yelled back, ‘Be jabbers, I ain’t a touchin’ ye’re jib!””

“Troth,” replied Mick, “I’ve seen some Scotchmen who were not any better fitted for sailors. I remimber once, in a ship I sailed in from Greenock, that the mate took on

a man, who we found out afterwards had been a Paisley weaver, and was driven by hard times to take any job he could get, to keep him from starvation. We were just getting down the Firth on a dirty night, when Tammas came up to see if he was wanted, and by this and by that, I'm a liar if he didn't actually put up an umbrella! Och, ye should have seen how we laughed when the mate caught hold of it and chucked it overboard, and tould him to lay aloft smartly! 'What d'ye mean?' said Tammas. 'Go aloft at once!' roared the mate. 'What?' cried the astonished Scotchman. 'Gang up they ladders? Man, it would be a tempting o' Providence tae dae that, an' besides, dae ye no see it's raining.'

The laugh was against the Scotchman this time. So the chaff went on, each pitting story against story, of which both appeared to have an inexhaustible fund, telling against the other's country, mingled with original observations characteristic of the humour of both nations. Sometimes the Irishman would get warm, when the hit was too palpable, but nothing appeared to ruffle the coolness of the Scot, who had a dry caustic wit.

In spite of their constant disputations, Stephen soon saw that they were the best of friends, and that the whole crew looked to them for amusement.

CHAPTER X

A "BRUSH" AND A "SHAVE"

THE fair wind with which the fleet had started continued steadily for about a week in more or less favourable directions, the ships keeping fairly well together, some of

them having occasionally to shorten sail, in accordance with signals from the convoying frigates, which kept moving round them like sheep-dogs driving a flock, so as to allow the slower sailors to catch up.

On board the *Adventure* everything had fallen into a regular routine. Stephen worked for a number of hours each day in the purser's office, performing his duties with a more intelligent interest now that he had become acquainted with the object of the voyage.

The fleet had been about ten days at sea, when one day at eight bells (noon), Captain Sommers gave orders for the course to be changed to a more southerly direction than that in which the other ships were steering. This gradually brought the *Adventure* away from the main body of the convoy, and it was soon observable that she was about to part company with them altogether.

Upon seeing this, signals ordering the ship to resume her course were at once made from the guardian frigate, and as these were disregarded by Captain Sommers, a shot was fired by *H.M.S. Hero*, which brought up the rear. The *Adventure*, however, kept upon its southern course, and soon only the sails of the remainder of the fleet were visible on the horizon.

In the afternoon Captain Sommers gave orders for the whole of the crew to be summoned to the main deck. When they had assembled, he addressed them from the poop, explaining to them fully the object of the voyage, and the chances they all had of making money if it succeeded. He concluded by pointing out that they would now have to look to themselves for defence, if attacked by a privateer or warship of the enemy.

To this the men responded by giving three cheers, and declaring that they would do their duty.

The crew was from this time organized upon the system

then in vogue in the navy. Each man had his station and knew the duties required of him. They were regularly drilled at the cannons, and at small-arm and cutlass practice.

As Stephen had volunteered as a combatant, though from his position on board he was exempt from such service, he was assigned a position in one of the main-deck gun-crews.

About a fortnight passed without special incidents. The wind continued favourable, and the weather gradually became warmer.

One morning a cry came from the look-out man in the foretop: "Sail on the port bow!"

Immediately all was excitement on board the *Adventure*. But few ships traversed these seas in those days, only occasionally some of the East India Company's fleet on their way to India round the Cape of Good Hope, a British man-of-war on a cruise, or the Spanish galleons on their way to or from the Spanish colonies in South America. The sight of a sail was therefore always an exciting incident. At that time it was specially so, as it was known that many private owners in France and Spain had obtained letters of marque, authorizing them to prey upon English commerce, and had sent out their ships, heavily armed, with that object. Rumour said that such vessels were not very particular as to their practices, but were indeed little better than pirates. To meet a British warship, in the circumstances in which the *Adventure* was then, might also lead to unpleasant consequences; for not only were the ship's papers made out for a voyage to the West Indies, and the captain would have to account for being so far out of his course; but the press laws allowed commanders of warships, if they happened to be short-handed, to take as many men as they thought fit, consistent with the safety of the vessel, from any merchantman they might meet, and press them into the service of the navy.

Captain Sommers had therefore every reason to avoid meeting another ship.

"What do you make of her, Mr. Roberts?" cried the captain to the chief officer, who had gone up to the foretop with a telescope.

"She is still hull down, sir," cried the mate, "but I make her out to be a full-rigged ship, about as large as we maybe, or larger, steering about nor'-nor'-west. I would think her likely to be a Spaniard or Frenchman homeward bound from the Canaries."

The snow-clad summit of the peak of Teneriffe was just visible over the distant horizon.

"Keep her away two points to the westward," said Captain Sommers to the man at the wheel.

The effect of this alteration of the course would be that the two ships, instead of approaching each other as they would have done had they kept to the directions they had previously been heading, would now gradually diverge.

It was soon observable, however, that the stranger had noticed the change in the course of the *Adventure*, and had altered her own so as to steer directly for her.

"That looks bad," said Captain Sommers. "We had better be prepared for anything that may happen."

The men were accordingly beat to quarters, the gun lashings cast off, tackles fitted, blocks oiled, the magazines opened, ammunition brought up, and the decks cleared for action.

Whilst these preparations were going on, the ships were gradually getting nearer, and though Captain Sommers had been quietly manoeuvring to avoid a meeting, by keeping still farther to the westward, he saw that keen eyes on board the stranger had quickly discerned his plan, and as rapidly measures had been taken to counteract it.

Captain Sommers could now see that the other was a

much larger and swifter ship than his own, and, as the wind was from the eastward, she had the weather-gauge of him, so that, to avoid a meeting, if the stranger wished it, was impracticable.

Several hours had passed since they had first caught sight of each other, as the wind was but light, and now sunset was close at hand.

"If we can only keep her off till after dark," said Captain Sommers to his chief officer, as they stood on the poop watching the stranger, "we might dodge behind Cape Flyaway yonder and get out of her sight."

So saying, he pointed to a large bank of cloud lying on the western horizon, which, to a landsman's eyes, looked distinctly like a projecting cape of land.

At length, when the ships were within half a mile of each other, Captain Sommers gave orders to hoist three flags on the mizzen. This was the private signal, understood by all ships of British nationality.

In reply, a gun was fired from the bow of the stranger, evidently blank cartridge, as a signal to stop, and the Spanish ensign was seen at the same time to flutter slowly up to the spanker gaff.

There was now no further uncertainty, so Captain Sommers at once gave orders to hoist the British flag at the peak, whilst the men at once broke out into three cheers of defiance. Quickly the Spaniard drew near, at the same time opening her ports and running out her guns, and it was seen that she was heavily armed, having six heavy cannon on each side, as well as her bow and stern chasers; more than double the armament of the *Adventure*.

"A tough customer we have met," cried the captain; "but never mind, Englishmen don't give in so readily, as we'll teach Master Spaniard before we have done with him."

Again a defiant cheer rose from the crew of the *Adventure*.

Just then the Spaniard let fly a whole broadside, but quickly seeing his intention, Captain Sommers had ordered the helm to be put up, and the *Adventure* swung round end-on to her adversary, so that the shots mostly flew by the stern.

"What on earth are ye daeing?" said Sandy Fulton to his Irish comrade, as the latter involuntarily ducked his head when one of the Spaniard's balls rushed hurtling between the main and mizzen masts, "Dae ye no see, Mick, that if ye were in ony danger, ye're head wud be aff before ye had time tae nod it?"

A roar of laughter at the discomfited Irishman broke out.

"Sure," said Mick, "how was I to know? I never had no acquaintance with them sort of things afore, but it's a veteran I'll soon be in less than an hour, even if I'm kilt."

The *Adventure* now began to reply, but it was little she could hope to do with her pop-guns of carronades against the strongly-built hull of her enemy; her only hope was to bring down some of the top-hamper, and so retard her sailing powers. So the orders given were to fire high.

The third shot cut the mizzen peak halliards of the Spaniard, and down fluttered the ensign.

"Hurrah!" cried the captain, "a guinea to the man who laid that shot! Where is he?"

Stephen stood out from his position and held up his hand. Truth to tell, his aim had been more a matter of luck than of skill.

"Pass it along, men, pass it to Herrick!" shouted Captain Sommers, taking the coin from his pocket, and it was duly brought to the lucky gunner.

A flush of joy went through Stephen. It was the first

money he had earned in his new career, and the circumstances in which he had won it made it all the more gratifying.

But there was not much time for such by-play. The Spaniard had now got the range, and her fire was producing terrible effect.

The *Adventure* was hulled several times, and about half a dozen men had been knocked over on the main deck. Stephen had almost been knocked insensible by the wind of a shot which passed close to his head, but soon recovered and got back to his post.

The Spanish soldiers, who were now seen to be clustering in her tops, also began to pepper the *Adventure* with their muskets. Suddenly a man dropped from the foretop on to the deck with an astounding crash, almost on top of Stephen's gun-crew as they were loading.

Just at that moment a lucky shot from the *Adventure* brought down the foretop-gallant mast of the Spaniard, and with it, of course, the foretop-gallant sails, royals, and all the jibs and forestay sails, completely smothering the forecastle in wreckage.

A triumphant cheer rose from the English.

"Now's our chance!" cried Captain Sommers, "give her a farewell broadside;" and he steered so that the *Adventure*'s fire raked the Spaniard from stem to stern, playing great havoc with the sails and rigging.

The sun had, at this very moment, sunk below the horizon, and the cloud-banks, which had made "Cape Fly-away", had gathered up, so that it was impossible to see any great distance.

"She's crippled for an hour or two," cried Captain Sommers. "Let's show her a clean pair of heels!"

Orders were given to set full sail, and the *Adventure* steered off to the west. As soon as it was dark, however,

instructions were issued to put out all lights, and to change the course to the south-east.

"She won't think of looking for us in that direction," said Captain Sommers.

A thick heat-fog had now risen, cutting off all view of objects two-ships' length away. Nevertheless a soft breeze continued to keep the ship forging ahead. Strict orders were given to preserve the utmost silence, and any instructions to the men forward were passed in a whisper by means of a line of men posted along the deck.

Just as Captain Sommers had come to the conclusion that they had got clear away, he was startled by hearing the sharp barking of a dog, followed by hoarse commands in a foreign language to it to keep quiet.

The anxiety of all on board the *Adventure* may be imagined when they discerned, through the gloom, the dim outline of their adversary, which almost immediately disappeared.

"Sharp man the captain must be," whispered Captain Sommers to Mr. Roberts, "to think of our trick of steering, and a lucky thing for us that his men did not keep a better look-out. I suppose the grog they serve out so liberally to those 'Diegos' to keep up their courage in a fight had something to do with it. By Jove! that was a narrow escape."

CHAPTER XI

A WRECK AND A RESCUE

NEXT morning, though the air was clear and the sky cloudless, not a sign of their enemy of the previous night was to be seen.

The dead were committed to the sea, with a brief ceremony, and as the wounded were reported to be doing well, the spirits of all soon rose, elated by their escape and by contentment with the way in which each had borne himself in the fight.

And now began a period in the voyage in which Stephen at last realized his ideal of a life at sea.

The ship had caught the north-east trade-wind, and went steadily on her course for days, scarcely requiring the pulling of a rope.

The sea had become in hue a brilliant deep ultramarine, but yet was so clear that the eye seemed to penetrate far into its depths, where jellyfish of various brilliant colours and of strange form could be seen suspended. The nautilus, or "Portuguese man-o'-war", as the sailors call it, floated round the ship in large numbers, their pretty white shells, with the tentacles put forth as sails or oars, forming a beautiful sight.

Shoals of flying-fish darted away on either side, scared as the ship advanced, or it may be by the multi-coloured bonito, a fish like a large salmon, which leapt out of the water in pursuit. For distances of nearly a hundred yards at a stretch these wonderful creatures skimmed over the water, diving at last into the crest of a wave.

At times the parrot-hued Coryphene or "dolphin" of sailors, could be seen lazily circulating round the ship, or the black fin of a shark, with its pilot fish, lurking under the stern. And constantly in the wake flew a crowd of snow-white birds, poising and circling, diving or ascending, apparently without moving a pinion.

And then the nights—what pen can describe the beauty of a night at sea in the tropics! The sky of a sombre indigo, whilst the stars shine out with a brightness unknown in temperate latitudes: the track of the ship like a milky

way into the depths, whilst the crest of every wave sparkles with magic brilliancy.

“ And now a radiance on the eastern sky
Betokens that the moon is drawing nigh,
Soon from the sombre depths does she emerge,
A coppery disk on the horizon’s verge,
Then rising, clearing to effulgence bright,
Casts o’er the sea a flood of silvery light,
A floating bridge, along whose tremulous ray
Our fancies fly to scenes now far away.”

One might verily imagine one’s self in a “Fairyland of Fancy” when lying in the roomy foretop of a ship in these latitudes. The mind is lulled by the gentle swing of the mast, the air, balmy and clear, allows the vision to penetrate to the extreme extent of the immense blue plain below, where the azure of the sky and sea blend one into the other, giving a sense of insignificance to one’s existence which is enhanced when, looking downwards, even the deck of the ship, so extensive when below, appears to be shrunk into but a little speck on the waste of waters.

At last, however, this pleasant time came to an end. The wind grew fainter and fainter every day, finally dying away altogether, and it was plainly seen by experienced seafarers that the ship had come into that region, the terror of sailors, known as the “doldrums” or “horse latitudes”.

Now came an anxious time for the officers, and a laborious one for the crew. Advantage had to be taken of every little puff of wind, every cat’s-paw or zephyr, as it circled irregularly over the sea, sometimes, as could be seen by the darkening ripples, just missing the ship by a few yards. The heat was oppressive, and the air heavy with moisture. Frequent thunderstorms would burst round and on the ship, when the panting sailors, worn out by constant trimming of the sails, would improvise a bath by stopping up

the scuppers, and refresh themselves by rolling in the pond which the tropical downpour soon produced on deck.

By such intermittent impulses the ship was at last carried over the line, when the usual ceremonious visit of Neptune and his attendants took place, and those of the crew who had not previously crossed were duly shaved, amongst them Mick Scanlon, who spluttered as he crawled from the shaving-tub, "Oh, musha, but I'm kilt entirely!"

But these regions are also the haunt of terrific storms, tornadoes in their full development, and in one of them the *Adventure* was caught. It was an appalling experience. Never could Stephen have imagined the elements to possess such fearful power. The waves, churned into a mass of foam, rushed together from all directions, the wind shrieked through the rigging above like the cries of a thousand demons let loose; masts bent like fishing-rods, sails were blown from the bolt-ropes in shreds, and carried away like a puff of smoke, and volumes of water dashed solidly on deck, seemingly determined to overwhelm and engulf the vessel.

On the morning after that terrible night the wind had moderated somewhat, but the sea still ran mountains high; the *Adventure* was floundering along with nothing but the foretopmast stay-sail set, when the man at the look-out in the fore-chains (too many seas were still coming on board for anyone to venture on the forecastle) sang out, "Ship on the larboard bow!" adding soon after, "appears to be in distress, sir."

Steadying himself against the mizzen backstay, Captain Sommers tried to examine her through the telescope, no easy task in such a sea, and amidst the rain and spindrift which lashed against his face.

"I should say that she is rather in distress, Mr. Roberts," he soon remarked. "All her masts are gone, and she is

so low in the water that she looks likely to founder any minute."

He handed the glass to the chief mate, who in turn looked at the wreck, for it was little more, carefully. Suddenly he exclaimed excitedly: "There are people on board—they are signalling us!"

The news quickly spread through the *Adventure*, and caused much excitement. Sailors will never refuse to help their fellows in distress, if it be humanly possible. But the sea was too high for the captain to take the responsibility of ordering out a boat. The men, were, however, called aft, and asked if any would volunteer to go to the rescue. Nearly all the watch at once proffered their aid. The captain selected six sailors, amongst whom were Sandy Fulton and Mick Scanlon; Mr. Hargreaves, the second officer, offered to take command, though it was his watch below. Stephen too was eager to go, but the captain told him to lend a hand by bringing up some brandy and other refreshment for the shipwrecked people and for the rescue party, as they would need it.

A boat amidships was unlashed, and the davits swung out. The men took their places, each with a life-belt round him, and other life-belts and some long coils of rope were thrown in beside them. The order was then given to slack away the falls.

At the last moment Stephen managed to scramble into the boat. The captain called to him to come back, but it was too late.

The launching of the boat was a most difficult and terribly dangerous operation. At one moment, as the ship rolled away, the boat would be high in the air, and only kept from dashing to pieces against the side of the ship by the almost superhuman efforts of the men with the oars pushing her off. Next moment it would be floating higher

than the ship's deck. At one such time, when the falls were slack, the men at each end managed to unhook the tackles simultaneously and cast off. That danger was overcome, but another, quite as great apparently, quickly followed, namely the breaking of the sea over the bow. Stephen was then found to be extremely useful, and it was seen to be very lucky that he had come, for, being free from the necessity of pulling, he could keep on baling, and so prevent the boat from filling and swamping. The wreck, being on the lee of the *Adventure*, was soon reached, but then another set of difficulties arose. It would have been madness to attempt to board her, for it would only have resulted in the boat's being staved in.

By a great effort and much skilful management the boat was brought for a moment close under the lee of the wreck, and a line was thrown on board. The people on deck, however, apparently did not understand what they ought to do, so the boat was driven off, trailing the line loosely behind her.

Again the attempt was made. This time one of the men on the wreck seemed to understand the movement, for he tried to lay hold of the line, but failed.

Once more the heroic rescuers returned to the trial, though by now they were nearly worn out by their labour, and they had the satisfaction of seeing the line caught by the man and made fast to the windlass-head.

Now their situation was much more secure. They had merely to pull in the line till they brought the boat within a few yards of the wreck, under her lee, where they were somewhat sheltered from wind and sea. From this position they could throw a life-buoy attached to a light line on board; the danger was that it might be carried out of reach by the swish of the waves.

It could now be seen that only three people were on

the wreck. One, a young man, he who had seized the line, was clinging to a rope fixed to the foremast, another man, gray-bearded, was lashed to the windlass-head on the weather side, and under the shelter of a piece of the weather bulwarks still standing was a young girl lashed to a belaying-pin.

At last the life-buoy, after several castings, was seized by the younger man, who climbed up the deck with great efforts, the wreck being almost on her beam-ends, and fixed it over the waist of the girl. He gave a signal, and as the sea rose the men at once hauled in the rope, and soon had the satisfaction of pulling the girl, more dead than alive, into the boat. Again was the buoy cast, and this time the young man put it over his own waist, and was pulled into the boat. There remained only the old man. The buoy was again cast, but the unfortunate man seemed to be too much dazed from cold and exposure to make any effort to help himself. He simply waved his hand, apparently signifying a resigned farewell.

The girl shrieked and made the most heartrending appeals to the men in the boat. She spoke in a foreign tongue, but it was easy to see her meaning. She was imploring them to help the old man, probably her father.

“We’ll try once more,” said Mr. Hargreaves, “the sea is going down somewhat, and perhaps we can manage it.”

Just as the boat came as near as possible to the ship, Stephen, who had thrown off his jacket and boots, seized the life-buoy, and, making a wonderful spring, managed fortunately to reach the deck of the sinking ship. Scrambling up to the windlass, he drew his knife and quickly cut the ropes lashing the old man to the windlass-head, then forced the life-belt over him. Finally, he took the old man, who now appeared to be in a faint, in his arms, and, clasping him round the waist, let himself slide down the sloping

deck into the water, signalling to his comrades in the boat to haul in. They were fortunate in getting on board, for scarcely had they been dragged in when Mr. Hargreaves called out, "The ship's going down! cut the line, and pull for your lives!"

Just as he uttered these words, the wreck gave a lurch and disappeared under the foaming waters. But for the immediate action of the sailors in carrying out the officer's orders, the boat would have been sucked down into the vortex caused by the sinking of the ship.

As the wreck had been to the lee of the *Adventure*, it was easy for the captain to bring down the ship, and to save the men from the hard labour of pulling back, which they would scarcely have managed against the high wind, after their toilsome efforts of rescue.

But even when they had approached near enough to secure a line to the ship, it was seen to be a very difficult business to get back on board. The only means was by slinging a "boatswain's chair", that is, a wooden seat in a loop of rope slung from the yard-arm. By this dangerous and difficult means the rescued passengers, and finally the whole of the crew, were slung on board.

Captain Sommers saw that it was impossible to pick up the boat, and therefore abandoned it.

The passengers were at once put to bed, and restoratives given them. Stephen gave up his cabin to the young girl, but that night he slept soundly enough on the saloon lockers, too much tired and exhausted even to dream of the exciting events of the day.



M 806

STEPHEN REACHED THE DECK OF THE SINKING SHIP

CHAPTER XII

DON ANTONIO'S STARTLING STORY

THE rescuing boat's-crew were warmly congratulated upon their brave deed next morning by all on board the *Adventure*. There was much speculation as to who the people saved might be, but not until the afternoon had they sufficiently recovered to give any explanation. Then, in the saloon, the old man, who was now seen to be a gentleman, related his story to the captain and officers.

Much to their satisfaction, they discovered that he could speak English, with some difficulty it was true, and a distinctly foreign accent, but still intelligibly.

His name, he informed them, was Antonio Rodriguez; he was a native of La Plata, but a descendant of one of the oldest Spanish families who had emigrated some generations before, and had acquired large estates in La Plata, the Banda Oriental, and Paraguay. He was a widower, and the young girl, Doña Josefina, was his daughter. The other man, whose name was Ignacio Lopez, was a Spaniard who had held some government appointments in Monte Video and Paraguay. The old gentleman and his daughter had only made his acquaintance as a fellow-passenger on the ship which had been wrecked, *La Purisima Concepcion*, which had been bound from Buenos Ayres to Cadiz. Don Antonio told them graphically how the crew of the Spanish ship had been frightened almost out of their wits by the violence of the storm, especially when the carpenter had reported that the ship had sprung a serious leak. All discipline had been lost. Some of the crew took to praying to images of the saints they had on board. Others had broken into the liquor-store, and finally, driven almost mad with fear and

drink, as the ship sank lower and lower, they had in desperation taken to the boats, abandoning the passengers to their fate.

"And now," said the old gentleman in a courtly manner, "I must first of all, in the name of myself and daughter, thank those who so bravely risked their lives in our rescue, and Señor Lopez will doubtless wish to do so also."

Mr. Hargreaves and Stephen were then duly presented by the captain.

Don Antonio shook them warmly by the hand, and expressed his thanks graciously. Señor Lopez, who spoke no English, also did so upon the position being explained to him by Don Antonio, and the young lady gracefully bowed her acknowledgments.

At the request of Don Antonio, the captain summoned aft the sailors who had formed the boat's-crew, and Don Antonio and Señor Lopez shook hands with them as well. Señor Rodriguez begged the captain to explain that he had lost all his effects on the wreck, but that when he got to Buenos Ayres, to which port he now learned the ship was bound, he would take care to reward them liberally.

Returning to the saloon, Don Antonio continued his story.

He had, when a young man, travelled in Europe for some years, spending a considerable period in England; hence his knowledge of the language.

"Ah, what a grand country!" he exclaimed. "What liberty! what institutions!"

He had always longed to revisit the old world, and he had considered that he was now in a sufficiently prosperous position to do so. He also wished to show to his only daughter the wonders he had so frequently spoken of.

"Besides," he added, "I could see that very troublous times were coming for my country, and that I should be

better away for a while, to let things settle down somewhat."

"Ah!" he added finally, "it's a black look-out, especially now that the English have been driven out of Buenos Ayres!"

"What!" cried everybody; "the English driven out of Buenos Ayres! Is it possible?"

A bomb-shell falling on board the *Adventure* would not have caused greater consternation. Each saw that the object of the voyage was frustrated, and that they might say goodbye to their hopes of fortune.

"Tell us all about it," they cried eagerly.

"I presume that you have heard—there has been time enough for the news to reach England," said Don Antonio, "how General Beresford captured Buenos Ayres, about the end of last June, with only about sixteen hundred men under his command. Truly a most daring deed."

"Yes, yes," said the captain impatiently; "we have heard all about that."

"Many of us," continued Don Antonio, "were rejoiced at their success, believing that they give more freedom to their colonies than the Spaniards. So General Beresford and his officers were received hospitably by some of the best families in Buenos Ayres, and the common people also showed good-will to the soldiers. It looked for a time as though the English were firmly established. But there were others who were not so well pleased, especially the Spanish officials, most of whom had been removed from their positions, and the sympathizers with Spain. Many, too, began to feel ashamed to see a city of nearly 60,000 inhabitants yield so tamely to the domination of only about 1400 men, for General Beresford had even reduced his small garrison by sending home about 200 marines with the treasure. By the same ship he had sent an urgent message

for reinforcements, but these did not arrive as the general expected, and he began to wonder if the Government had ignored his request through jealousy, owing to the expedition not having been initiated at head-quarters in London.

“Be that as it may, things could not be expected to remain as they were, when week after week went past and the Spaniards saw that the English had only about enough men to man the ramparts of the fort, and no further forces apparently were coming.

“General Beresford is no fool, and he quite realized the weakness of his position. He knew that the Spaniards are a race of arch-conspirators, and though there were no open signs of resistance, he doubtless heard, through his secret agents, that a plot was being hatched to drive him out. In fact, he at last issued a decree ordering all persons to give up their arms under the penalty of death.

“Hearing that a band of men had assembled, under the leadership of a Señor Puyrredon, about a league to the north of the town, evidently with the design of organizing a rising, he despatched a regiment to disperse them. Though the English were greatly outnumbered, they quickly drove the conspirators away, and took from them nine cannon, which they brought back as trophies into the town.

“For some weeks there was a lull, and the English began to think that perhaps there was no great need for alarm. But presently the explosion came, and on the 11th August the news reached General Beresford that an army of about four thousand men was marching to attack him.

“The leader of this rising was, after all, not a Spaniard, but a Frenchman, one Captain Santiago Liniers, who had been in the Spanish naval service, and was latterly Captain of the port of Ensenada, a harbour near Buenos Ayres.

“On the morning of the 12th of August the army of Liniers opened fire on the English. General Beresford

had placed his forces round the plaza, or central square of the town. The troops of the 'patriots', as they had styled themselves, attacked the English on three sides from the streets leading into the plaza, and, being mostly horsemen, were able to break the lines at more than one place, in spite of the fierce resistance they encountered.

"Your countrymen fought like lions," said Don Antonio; "but what could they do, rushed at by cavalry and infantry from several directions at once, while at the same time they were being mowed down by musketry fire from the roofs of the houses around.

"At last the general gave the signal to retreat to the fort—he would have been well advised if he had taken up his position there at first—and the troops retired in good order, General Beresford being the last man to cross the drawbridge.

"Encouraged by the success of the 'patriots' the people in the town now rose, and from the ramparts it could be seen that about ten thousand men were surrounding the fort, all eager to attack it.

"The English general saw that it was hopeless to resist: he had lost nearly half his men. He therefore ordered a flag of truce to be hoisted.

"Liniers sent an officer to demand an unconditional surrender, but this was sturdily declined by General Beresford, who said that he would only yield if his men were allowed to march out with the honours of war.

"Struck with admiration at his bravery, Captain Liniers readily agreed to grant these terms.

"The English garrison then marched out of the fort with drums beating and banners flying, and piled their arms in front of the cabildo, or town-house, on one side of the plaza. The spectators observed a respectful demeanour; there were no cheers nor any hostile demonstrations.

"Captain Liniers stepped up to General Beresford and embraced him, and publicly complimented him upon the gallant defence he had made.

"Having been granted the honours of war, General Beresford and his men of course expected that they would be allowed to leave the country freely and unmolested. I am sorry to say, however, that the Spanish authorities, who at once came back to office again, declared that Liniers had no power to grant such terms, and at the time we left Buenos Ayres, General Beresford and his officers were kept as prisoners, whilst his soldiers were being sent, in parties, also as prisoners, to various places inland."

"And what became of Sir Home Popham's fleet?" anxiously asked Captain Sommers.

"Well," replied Don Antonio, "they could not well remain at Buenos Ayres after what had happened. So they went down to Monte Video and tried to take that place by assault, but were unsuccessful, so they have gone off to a place named Maldonado, on the Atlantic coast of the Banda Oriental, where we heard they had succeeded in effecting a landing—the place is too isolated for much resistance to be made, and according to the latest accounts they were there still, probably waiting for reinforcements, or orders to leave for England."

CHAPTER XIII

PEPITA

THE astounding news which they had just heard from Don Antonio threw Captain Sommers and his officers into a state of great alarm and perplexity. It was evident that, if Spanish authority had been re-established at Buenos

Ayres, the very *raison d'être* of the expedition had vanished, and if the British fleet had been recalled, as was not improbable, in view of the attitude taken by the Government, it would be simply going into the lion's mouth for the *Adventure* to proceed to the River Plate.

After a long and anxious consultation with his officers, however, Captain Sommers decided to go on. He felt it would be cowardly to abandon any opportunity; but he resolved to approach their destination with the greatest caution, and to put to sea again if he found that there was no chance of carrying out their scheme.

As the state of affairs became known throughout the ship, a general feeling of anxiety and depression was produced.

Probably the least affected by that feeling was Stephen, for he had not been led to embark on this expedition by the hopes of making great gain, but merely joined it casually, and from pure love of the sea and of adventure.

The storm had died away, and nature appeared to have withdrawn all obstacles to their progress. The ship had now caught the south-east trades, and the weather was as lovely as it had been in the northern trade-wind belt. Day after day the ship pursued her way with favouring breezes over a lovely blue sea.

Stephen had now plenty of leisure on his hands, the papers relating to the cargo having been all completed. He was therefore at liberty to spend much of his time in the company of the passengers. He soon found that Don Antonio was a wonderfully entertaining companion. He was well educated, and had read and travelled much; an acute observer of men and events, his commentaries upon them were always worth listening to, and were expressed in language both interesting and graphic.

Stephen was naturally curious to learn something of the

country to which the *Adventure* was bound. No better informant could have been found than Don Antonio.

He told the lad of the wonderful River Plate, or more properly Rio de la Plata, discovered by the Spanish navigator Juan Diaz de Solis in 1515, but first explored by Sebastian Cabot, who, though of Venetian extraction, was a native of Bristol, the very port from which the *Adventure* hailed. Cabot had given to the new country the name of the "River of Silver", because he found that the Indians on its banks wore massive ornaments of that metal, which he imagined must be plentiful in the district. He explained that, as now defined, the Plate was more like an estuary than a river, being about 150 miles wide at Monte Video, where it might be said to merge into the sea, and about 30 miles wide at Buenos Ayres, and that it was estimated that more fresh water poured through it than flows down the whole of the rivers of Europe combined.

He described how two great rivers, the Paraná and the Uruguay, whose united waters formed the River Plate, penetrated the South American Continent for thousands of miles, being navigable by large ships for many hundreds of miles of their course; how another great river, the Paraguay, fell into the Paraná some seven hundred miles above Buenos Ayres, coming from the far interior of Brazil, and between those rivers was the country of Paraguay, one of the loveliest and most romantic in the world, a perfect Eden in climate and fertility.

From Buenos Ayres vast plains extended inland for thousands of miles, seemingly as level as the sea, over which pastured thousands of cattle, but there was room for myriads more when once the aboriginal Indians could be brought under restraint. Fertile rolling prairies lay between the rivers Paraná and Uruguay, and continued across into the Banda Oriental, containing numerous cattle

“estancias”, and in time to come they might be covered with wheat-fields.

Don Antonio waxed enthusiastic when he spoke of the great future in store for this richly-endowed region. Not only had it all the pastoral and agricultural resources he had already spoken of, but the territory stretched far into the tropics, where every kind of produce requiring a hot climate could be raised, such as sugar, cotton, tobacco, oranges, &c. Then it was bounded on the west by the mighty range of the Andes, within whose recesses mineral treasures of fabulous value were known to exist, and more would doubtless be found. All that was required was an influx of industrious people and good government. “Ah!” said the old gentleman, “what might such a country not become if it were in the hands of your people instead of those of the Spaniards! that is why I so greatly deplore the expulsion of the English from Buenos Ayres.”

Then he went on to give an account of his own estates, one situated in the Banda Oriental, or province of Uruguay, extending over twelve and a half square leagues, being about five leagues in length and two and a half in breadth. Upon it he had about 8000 head of cattle and 15,000 horses, more or less; they never could tell exactly, as they were allowed to run loose, and only roughly counted once a year. The estancias he owned in La Plata and Paraguay were even more extensive, and perhaps had greater prospects, though they were of less present value owing to the fact that they were more remote from the sea-board. These estates had been acquired by his ancestors in the early days of the colony, when land could be had almost for nothing. “Even now,” said Don Antonio, “so great is the superabundance of land that estates are bought and sold, not by their area at so much an acre, a square mile, or even a square league, but simply by paying so much a head for

the cattle upon them and for the few fixtures, such perhaps as half a dozen mud huts, fences round corrals, &c. Thus, for example, my Uruguayan estate might be valued at 4s. each for the head of horned cattle, and 1s. each for the horses, while the land would be thrown in gratis to the purchaser."

On other occasions Don Antonio would relate to Stephen episodes from the early history of the colony. He would tell how Don Pedro de Mendoza, a Spanish officer, had first founded a settlement in 1535, twenty years after the discovery of the great river, which he named Buenos Ayres, that is, "good airs", on account of the salubrity of the climate and gentleness of the breeze; how the first settlers were driven away by the aboriginal Indians, the Querendis, who killed many of them and burned their houses; and it was not until 1580, or forty-five years later, after several disasters, that Don Juan de Garay succeeded in firmly establishing the settlement. Meantime the Spaniards had established their capital at Asuncion, in Paraguay, some twelve hundred miles up the river, a journey of many weeks, sometimes many months, in those days.

"Ah! they were wonderful people, those old Spaniards," exclaimed Don Antonio; "so brave and so resourceful! In spite of their cruelty one cannot help admiring them. Think of them groping their way out to these shores, 7000 miles from their country, in caravels little larger than a modern fishing-boat, when navigation was scarcely sufficiently understood to be a guide to them. And then winding their way up rivers full of shifting sand-banks, against rapid currents, knowing that hostile savages on either side watched them from behind the bushes, ready to attack them whenever a chance presented itself.

"And to think," he continued, "that when the Spaniards first landed there was not a horse, cow, or sheep in the

country, and yet, see how they have multiplied! Why, they soon came to be not only the support, but the protection of the early settlers. For you must know that in those old days, when Buenos Ayres was repeatedly attacked by the Indians, and before it had a fort, some genius hit upon the idea of protecting the town by living ramparts, that is, by simply driving in the half-wild cattle till they surrounded the place in a continuous herd. Through such a mob the Indians did not dare to venture, and, as they had no firearms, the protection was quite effective."

With tales like these, and upon many other subjects, did Don Antonio beguile the time as the ship sailed steadily on before the trade-wind.

But it must not be inferred that Stephen's attention was wholly taken up in listening to Don Antonio. He was drawn to the passengers' society by another attraction, greater even to a young man than that of the thirst for knowledge.

Doña Josefina, Don Antonio's charming daughter, was about Stephen's own age, barely sixteen; but women mature early under these Southern skies, so she looked older, and was already blossoming into beauteous womanhood. Her hair was black as the raven's wing, her features regular, and her complexion just tinged with a light olive. But the strongest attraction of all was her eyes, dark, liquid, and sympathetic, shielded by long, curled lashes. When she had recovered from the terrible shock of the shipwreck, she displayed a bright and vivacious disposition, and seemed greatly interested in all her surroundings.

With her Stephen soon became the best of friends, and he longed to be able to converse more freely with her. This was the motive which first led him to beg Don Antonio to teach him Spanish, to which request the old

gentleman willingly agreed, as he admired the lad's enterprise, directed, as he thought, by purely business instinct.

Stephen's progress in acquiring the language was very rapid. How could it be otherwise with such an incentive? More especially was this the case when Doña Josefina took part in the lessons, and helped him by repeating the names of various objects in Spanish, making use also of the few words in English her father had taught her. It was an amusing and delightful exercise for these two young people to attempt to carry on a conversation in broken phrases from each other's language, supplemented by signs where words failed them, while Don Antonio gravely listened, correcting errors and supplying the expressions.

At length, one day when their intercourse had made them more intimate, Doña Josefina exclaimed: "I think you might call me Pepita instead of the formal Josefina; it's the name I am always called by my father and my friends, and I am sure Father will not object."

"Not in the least, hija mia," fondly replied Don Antonio, "and in exchange we will henceforth call our friend here Don Esteban: that's the Spanish for your name, Stephen."

And so it was arranged, and the cordial relations between Stephen and the passengers who had so unexpectedly come on board grew greater every day.

"I am going to let you into a little secret," said Don Antonio one morning as they walked the deck together, the young lady not having yet made her appearance. "My daughter and I have a little private code of signals."

So saying, Don Antonio suddenly called out "Pe-pee-ta!" in a manner closely resembling the hoot or cry of an owl.

"Sí, papa! Aquí estoy!" (here I am) at once responded the voice of Josefina, as she bounded up the companion way.

"You see," said Don Antonio, laughing, "that's the way to fetch her here quickly."

He then went on to explain how the idea had occurred to him. One night when walking in a plantation near one of his *estancia* houses, Pepita, then but a little thing, had disappeared for a minute under the shade of the trees, and when he was about to call to her an owl in one of the branches hooted in such a way that the child actually thought it was her father's voice summoning her. It became quite a little game between them after that to imitate the hoot. The sound penetrated to a much greater distance than when uttered in an ordinary tone. And so at last it came to be understood that whenever one of them wished to call the other urgently it was only necessary to signal the wish by hooting "Pe-pee-ta!"

After that they frequently practised this little trick throughout the ship. Stephen, too, became quite an adept in imitating the sound. Did he or Don Antonio observe anything strange or pretty in the sea whilst the young lady was below, which they thought she would like to see, they had only to cry "Pe-pee-ta!" to bring her at once upon the scene.

With the other passenger, Señor Lopez, Stephen's intimacy did not develop as with Señor Rodriguez and his daughter. Though correct enough in his conduct, and courteous in a somewhat haughty way, as is characteristic of the proud gentleman of his race, Señor Lopez did not display any geniality or indication of friendliness to anyone on board. He seemed to be of a naturally sullen disposition, and Don Antonio hinted that his temper had not been improved by the fact that he had lost in the shipwreck all the money which he had been amassing for years in order to be able to retire in comfortable circumstances to Spain, and also that he was now being taken back to Buenos Ayres, which he hated, and where perhaps there might be some people whom he would not

like to meet, however anxious they might be to see him. Don Antonio confided to Stephen that neither he nor Pepita liked the man, and that there had been rather a coolness between them since a day when he (Don Antonio), fancying that he was paying Pepita a little too marked attention, had quietly indicated to him that the accident of being fellow-passengers was not sufficient to obliterate social inequalities. "A fellow like that," indignantly cried Don Antonio, "presuming to address my daughter as a suitor!"

Señor Rodriguez further explained that as a Spaniard Señor Lopez would cordially hate the English, and this feeling would probably have been intensified by the recent triumph of General Beresford—an affront to the boasted prowess of Spain.

These remarks naturally influenced Stephen to regard Señor Lopez with considerably more attention, and to arouse in his mind feelings of dislike and suspicion, where before there had only been indifference. His aversion was intensified by the manner in which that gentleman glared at him from under his bushy black eyebrows at times when he thought he was unobserved. The expression did not improve his appearance, which was of a type not tending to arouse sympathy—dark sallow complexion, small bead-like eyes set closely together, and jet-black beard and moustache, the latter brushed fiercely upwards. It appeared to Stephen that the Spaniard's ill-will to the British generally had more particularly been directed against himself of late, since he had observed his growing favour in the eyes of Doña Josefina, and this he could easily account for after what he had heard. Doubtless the demon passion jealousy was at work.

"That fellow will probably do us an ill turn if he can," said Stephen to himself. "I must keep an eye upon him."

CHAPTER XIV.

A CALM AND A STORM.

THE fair wind which had carried the *Adventure* so steadily onwards for some weeks now began gradually to die away, until at last the ship lay like a log in a dead calm. The ocean, however, continued to heave in a slow steady swell, which caused the whole of the sails to flap against the mast with a noise like a pistol-shot every time the vessel heeled over, as it fell from crest to trough. The sun blazed down fiercely and almost vertically, causing the pitch to bubble up from the seams of the deck, and the heat was almost overpowering. However delightful a calm may appear in theory to the landsman, whose experience has only been such as that of crossing the English Channel, there is nothing so trying and aggravating to the seafarer. The temper of everyone on board the *Adventure* had well-nigh gone to pieces after about ten days' experience of this situation.

The mates, usually good-natured, swore upon the slightest provocation, or with none at all, at the men who had been put to such tiresome tasks as scraping down the masts and yards, tarring the rigging, or even painting the outside of the ship, being slung, for the purpose, over the side on stages or boatswain's chairs.

But the most notable of all changes was observable in the captain. He had been more or less upset ever since he had heard the description from Don Antonio of the circumstances that had recently occurred at the River Plate, and which appeared more than likely to disappoint his hopes of making a small fortune out of this venture, and he was naturally most impatient to be on the spot, so that he might be able

to judge for himself what he had better do. This period of enforced stagnation almost drove him mad. As all on board were more or less in the same position as regarded their interests, they were ready to make allowances when the captain had at times given way to outbreaks of temper such as would not have been expected from one usually of such civil bearing. But they began to resent it when day after day he kept on "hazing" the crew, giving orders direct, though an officer was present, sometimes in contradiction to the latter's instructions, and meddling with matters in a manner tending to upset all discipline in the ship. The men began to shake their heads, and to fancy that "something was wrong with the Old Man"; but their sympathy quickly veered into irritation when it became evident to everybody that the captain, in his desperation, had taken to drinking.

At first he carried on the practice in secret, and the truth could only be suspected from the indications given by his flushed face and somewhat stuttering speech; but soon he lost all sense of shame, and brought up a bottle and glass openly on deck, from which he took copious draughts at brief intervals, whilst cursing volubly between-whiles at everybody and everything, and rapidly turning the ship into a floating hell.

Stephen as yet had formed but little idea of the absolute power of a captain on board his ship, and was therefore somewhat surprised that the officers did not interfere when they saw that the captain was obviously in such a condition as to be incapable of exercising his authority in a sane manner. They ought, he thought, to take such action as would put an end to a state of affairs which was not only becoming intolerable, but might endanger the safety of the ship.

It happened that one day Mick Scanlon was engaged on

some job on the mizzen rigging when the captain suddenly set upon him without the slightest provocation, calling him all the most opprobrious names he could think of, and finally ordering him to go forward, with the parting remark that he was no sailor, but what could be expected from an Irish "bog-trotter".

Stung to the quick, Mick flushed as red as fire, but he had sufficient self-control and remembrance of the position to limit himself to the reply: "Shure, Cap'n, I was only afther doing me duty."

"How dare you speak back to me?" roared the captain like a maniac. "Here, boatswain, trice this man up and give him two dozen!"

The boatswain stepped forward at once, ready to carry out the captain's brutal order. From red, Mick suddenly turned to white, and appeared to quiver all over. Catching sight of Stephen, who was standing close by, Mick made a sudden appeal.

"Och, Mr. Herrick, won't you spake to the captain and save me from this disgrace? Sure I've done nothing, an' I've never been flogged before. Do spake for me!"

Burning with a sense of injustice, Stephen ventured to ask Captain Sommers to let the man off, pointing out that he had really done nothing wrong.

The result of his interference was that the captain immediately turned upon Stephen, hurling at him the most insulting terms, and concluding by asking:

"Who are you anyhow? A vagabond that I picked up in a smuggler's cave. More than likely some escaped jail-bird, or even a 'cheat-the-gallows' sheep-stealer. Go to your cabin at once, and stay there till I give you leave to come on deck."

There was nothing for it but to obey, so Stephen sadly went below, where his repose was disturbed in the next

half-hour by the sound of the switch of the boatswain's cat-o'-nine-tails, and the groans of the unfortunate Irish sailor. Stephen felt deeply affronted, more especially as Don Antonio and Pepita had been present during this scene.

He was comforted, however, that night by a visit from Don Antonio, who came stealthily to his cabin in order to tell him that he and Pepita did not think any the less of him on account of what had passed, but on the contrary had admired his pluck in interceding with the captain.

"But to tell the truth," said Don Antonio, "I don't understand the English character. Had it been a Spaniard to whom such words were spoken, it is more than likely that the captain would have had a knife through his heart, let the consequences be as they might."

Don Antonio continued by remarking that he was rather surprised to think that such a fine young man as Stephen could resign himself to stay on board a ship at the mercy of such a ruffian as the captain, when, if he came on shore in South America, he would find such unbounded scope for his energies that his fortune was secure.

That night, though he had not yet been given permission to leave his cabin, Stephen crept quietly forward in the middle watch, when he felt sure the captain would be sunk in a drunken sleep, in order to express his sympathy with poor Mick.

He found the Irishman in a terribly excited state, also suffering acutely, but the shame seemed to have affected him more than anything. He was scarcely able to articulate, so great was his rage and frenzy. His whole soul seemed to be concentrated in the desire to "get aven" with the captain. The men in the forecastle fully sympathized with him, and Stephen saw that it would take little more to drive them into open mutiny. Especially excited was Sandy Fulton, from whose constitutional coolness and native caution a very

different result might have been expected. But even in the circumstances his Scotch "canniness" did not altogether forsake him. "I tell you what," he said to Mick, "it's no use trying to get even with a captain; I have been lang enough at sea to learn that. The best thing we can dae is tae leave the ship as sune as ever we can get a chance."

These words, coming on top of Don Antonio's remarks, led Stephen to form an instant resolve.

Taking Sandy and Mick apart, he whispered to them that he too had resolved to leave the ship and to try his fortune in South America. "It will be much better," he said, "for us all to go together."

The men agreed at once; and it was then and there arranged that as soon as the ship got into a port they would all manage to go off somehow or other.

During the night a breeze sprang up, which gradually gathered in force, so that Stephen could tell from his cabin, by the motion of the ship, that she was making rapid progress.

Having waited until mid-day to hear from the captain, Stephen at length resolved to go on deck. The captain was standing by the man at the wheel, apparently quite himself again, but though he must have seen Stephen come up, he appeared to take no notice of him. Nor did he again allude to the matter in the days which followed. Stephen sometimes fancied that the captain glanced at him in a somewhat shamefaced manner, but he thought it best not to raise the question, knowing that, however much in the wrong, a captain does not readily apologize to a subaltern.

Señor Lopez, Stephen imagined, appeared to look at him in a more malignant manner than ever. He, too, had been present when Stephen had been ordered to his cabin, and had then seemed to gloat triumphantly over the event.

Don Antonio, when Stephen confided to him his intention to leave the ship, warmly applauded the idea. He gave him the address of his town house in Monte Video, and offered a shelter for himself and friends, should it be necessary, at his Uruguayan estancia.

When Stephen mentioned his suspicions regarding Señor Lopez, he quite agreed that it would be well to keep him under close observation. "I have already told you," said he, "that this man has many reasons to be disappointed and exasperated, and probably he will try to wreak his resentment upon you English, whom he regards as the hereditary enemies of his race. I have noticed, too, that he seems to look upon you with particular dislike, why I am at a loss to know, as you helped to save his life." Stephen imagined that he knew the cause.

CHAPTER XV

"INTO THE FULMINANT DEADLY BREACH"

HAVING once caught a favouring breeze, the *Adventure* rapidly sailed across the South Atlantic without further remarkable incidents until, about a fortnight later, the captain ascertained by observation that he ought soon to be making the land.

A bright look-out was accordingly kept, and that afternoon land was spied from the foretop, which the captain soon made out to be Cape Santa Maria, just at the mouth of the River Plate.

It was the last day of January, 1807, and the passage had occupied about eleven weeks.

Being now certain of the position of the ship, Captain

Sommers began to cautiously creep along the land. The situation gave rise to much anxiety, not only on account of the difficult navigation, which was the more dangerous as there were no charts of the River Plate to be obtained by English captains in those days, but also on account of the uncertainty of the state of affairs on shore.

After a few hours' sailing it was evident from the change in the appearance of the sea, muddy red water floating on the blue waves, that they were approaching the River Plate.

At this juncture, when the captain was in the greatest perplexity as to the course he should steer, Señor Lopez came forward and intimated that he wished to make a communication to him. Don Antonio having offered his services as interpreter, Señor Lopez stated that, as he had been for some years a visiting officer of customs at Monte Video, he was perfectly acquainted with the river, and he would now be glad to act as pilot to take in the ship.

Much relieved, Captain Sommers at once accepted the proposal.

Acting under Señor Lopez's directions, fuller sail was now spread, and the vessel was making rapid progress, and rounding a headland, behind which, the volunteer pilot said, was the port of Monte Video, when suddenly the ship was brought up by a shock that nearly shook the masts overboard, and threw her all aback.

“Heavens and earth,” cried the captain, “we’re aground!” Such, indeed, was soon seen to be the case; the *Adventure* had run on to one of the numerous sand-banks which abound in the great estuary. For a time all was consternation. There was good reason for alarm, considering the dangerous position of the vessel and the probably disastrous ending of the voyage. But soon order was restored, the captain gave his orders calmly, and they were carried out with coolness and alacrity.

The carpenter, having sounded the well, gave the cheering report that the ship was making no water. Soundings were at once taken on both sides, and it was discovered that the ship was aground only on the port quarter forward. The bottom was found to be of comparatively soft mud.

After some hours the chief officer reported that the water appeared from the soundings to be rising. All the boats were then got out, and a strong effort was made to warp the ship off the shoal. To the great delight of everybody, it was at length perceptible that she had moved a little, and a united effort of the boats' crews at last set her free.

"Confound that fellow for a pilot!" said the captain. "It's my belief that he really intended to cast away the ship."

This remark confirmed the suspicions of Stephen and Don Antonio, the latter even giving the captain a hint to that effect.

Captain Sommers therefore decided to resume charge of the ship, and he ordered two of the boats to keep about a hundred yards ahead of her, and take soundings regularly.

In about two hours more all on board the *Adventure* were startled by the sudden appearance of a large ship from behind the point, evidently a man-of-war, which, immediately upon catching sight of them, made a signal for them to stop, and steered a course to intercept them.

What could this mean? Was she friend or foe? This question was quickly answered by the glorious British ensign floating out from her stern.

The men on the *Adventure* could not restrain themselves from cheering.

A signal was soon perceived to be hoisted on the man-of-war requesting the captain of the *Adventure* to come on

board. As the ship already had her boats out, this order was quickly executed, and the *Adventure* was hove-to in the meantime. In about an hour Captain Sommers returned. He was in a high state of excitement, and quickly told the news to an eager audience on the poop. It appeared that the British Government had not, after all, been inert, but had despatched reinforcements for General Beresford, consisting of a squadron under Rear-Admiral Sterling, and about five thousand troops, commanded by Sir Samuel Auchmuty. These had, however, arrived too late to enable the British to retain Buenos Ayres. They had, therefore, joined the forces of Commodore Popham at Maldonado, and it was soon afterwards decided to make another attack on Monte Video.

The expedition for that purpose had started on 19th January, and they were actually now, said Captain Sommers, besieging the place, which was offering a much greater resistance than they had anticipated. He had been ordered to proceed to the outer roads of the beleaguered port, and there to place himself under the orders of the British admiral.

Having received directions as to the course to be steered from the commander of *H.M.S. Medusa*, the warship he had boarded, Captain Sommers now proceeded with confidence, and it did not take long for him to bring his ship round the point, when they suddenly came into sight of Monte Video.

It was an animated scene that met the view of those on board the *Adventure*. The Bay of Monte Video is almost semicircular. To the right the town stood upon a peninsula which gradually rises from the sea. The flat-roofed houses stood in terraces one above the other; two lofty towers of a cathedral projected above all. On the left extremity of the bay the land rose in the form of a round

conical hill to an altitude of about a hundred feet. On this mound was a fort of masonry massively built, over which the Spanish flag still flew.

Don Antonio explained to Stephen that from this hill the place took its name. When the early explorers first sailed up the River Plate the first land the look-out man descried was this eminence, which, in contrast to the flat adjacent shores, seemed to him a mountain, so he cried, in his Venetian lingo "Monte video!" (I see a mountain).

But the shipping in the bay attracted more immediate attention than the geographical features of the land. In front were eight large British men-of-war, anchored at a distance of about a mile from the shore—evidently the water was too shallow to allow them to go nearer,—and to the left were anchored a fleet of mercantile craft. Towards the latter Captain Sommers steered his ship, and soon came to anchor amongst them. He then repaired on board the flag-ship to report himself and take instructions from the admiral. Of course no one was allowed to leave the *Adventure*.

Captain Sommers was again full of news and excitement when he returned. He had learned that the British troops had been landed on 19th January, or just twelve days before, and had had a good deal of hard fighting with the Spanish garrison. The place was strongly fortified with no fewer than 160 guns in position on the ramparts, which kept up a constant fire upon the British, besides which the garrison had made frequent sorties in force. The result had been very doubtful for a time, but now the British had at last succeeded in completely investing the town, and had been able to repulse every sortie. The admiral had furnished the land forces with some heavy guns with which to make a breach in the wall of the city, and the general had now reported that he had made what he con-

sidered to be a practicable breach, and would probably attempt to take the place by storm that night.

It may easily be conceived what excitement was produced on board the *Adventure* by this story.

All eyes were now directed towards the shore, and every telescope was in requisition.

The bombardment, which had been suspended for a few hours just previous to the arrival of the *Adventure*, while the English general sent a messenger with a flag of truce to the Spanish commandant summoning him to surrender, now recommenced with redoubled fury, indicating that the proposal had been rejected. The roaring of the cannon was incessant, and the atmosphere soon became a dense mass of smoke, impregnated with the smell of gunpowder.

The scene was most entrancing. It looked like a panorama with firework accessories. From a spectacular point of view it was splendid, but appalling and horrifying when it was remembered that this was war in earnest, that the issue was still doubtful, and that hundreds of brave men were falling on both sides.

The position of every cannon on the walls could be clearly distinguished from the flash and smoke of each discharge, and also that of the besieging batteries. The course of the shells through the air could easily be followed by the coil of smoke left by the burning fuse. Soon the place where the breach had been made could be located from the concentration of the fire, and towards this spot all eyes were directed. The effect of each shot was watched, and as piece after piece of the wall tumbled and fell, excited cheers rose from the ships.

The battle-ships kept on firing with the regularity of machines, demonstrating the perfect training of the crews, but the admiral apparently thought that the effect of this fire was more moral than material, as now and again the

gun-boats of lighter draft were seen to sail away from the line of war-ships, and, running close under the walls, to pour volley after volley into the town. Sometimes the result would be to bring down the whole parapet and cornice of a house, to the delight of the spectators in the bay.

Night closed in, but still the firing went on, the flash of the cannon constantly lighting up the gloom, while the course of the hurtling shells could be easily followed. The concussion at last brought down torrents of rain, but in spite of this discomfort few left the deck that night. About four in the morning there was a sudden, awful pause, and a thrill went through men's minds, for they felt that now the storming of the walls was taking place. At the distance at which the ships lay from the shore nothing could be discerned of what was going on, nor for a time was any sound heard, until the sharp rattle of musketry denoted that a severe struggle had begun.

With the utmost anxiety all waited for the dawn.

The first rays of sunlight exhibited the British ensign unfurled, and proudly floating over the battlements. A triumphant cheer burst from the whole of the ships, and men went almost frantic with delight.

The might of England had again triumphed! What great results might follow!

Signals were now made to the shipping that they were at liberty to communicate with the shore. Captain Sommers at once ordered his boat to get ready and set out for the landing-place. He was gone for some hours, and when he came back he had a stirring story to tell.

He had learned from some of the officers who had taken part in the engagement that the storming-party, consisting of six regiments, had mustered behind the batteries, which at a given signal had suddenly ceased firing, just as had

been observed from the ships. The column then advanced in solemn silence, led by a company of the Grenadiers.

The "forlorn hope" had been commanded by Lieutenant Everard, who had earnestly solicited this important and dangerous post.

The distance to be traversed from the British lines to the breach was about sixteen hundred yards. When just about half-way the approach of the troops was discovered by the enemy, and a destructive fire from every available gun and from the musketry of the garrison was opened upon the column. In the darkness and confusion the leaders feared they had lost the right direction, for they were astounded, when they gained the walls, to find no trace of the breach.

In this terrible situation, uncertain how to act, and exposed to a galling fire without any shelter available, the troops courageously stood their ground for about a quarter of an hour.

Just then the first faint glimmer of the dawn appeared, and suddenly Captain Renny of the 40th shouted loudly, "I've found the breach! Come on, lads!" Waving his sword he dashed on, followed by a crowd of brave fellows.

It was then discovered that during the night the enemy had cunningly disguised the breach by throwing across it a curtain of hides, and had barricaded it with piles of tallow in skins, rendering it nearly impracticable.

Nothing, however, could daunt the courage or stop the impetuosity of our men. Once the officers had shown them the way they came on with a rush, cheering at the top of their voices.

It is impossible to describe the tremendous struggle which followed. Even those engaged in it retained but a confused recollection of some of the incidents.

The gallant Captain Renny fell almost at once. His

place was instantly taken by Colonel Vassal of the 38th, who was seen to rush right up to the barricade, mount it, and wave his sword, encouraging his men to the onset, and then fall, shot through the heart. Onward and upwards the soldiers charged, only to be met with the deadly fire and the bayonet points of the defenders.

Some dragged at the bales of tallow and hides, which, as they loosened, rolled down the slope, hurling the soldiers with them. From behind, fresh bales were thrown into the breach, and to effect an entrance seemed hopeless.

But again and again the attack was gallantly renewed. Column after column dashed to the aid of those who were sealing the breach, and when at last they got over the barricade and cleared it away, they poured into the town. The carnage on both sides was dreadful and uninterrupted. The slopes of the ramparts and the streets were thickly strewn with the killed and wounded.

At length the Spaniards surrendered, and the bugles sounded "Cease firing!"

Intoxicated as they were with the rage of battle, and exasperated by the sight of their dead and dying comrades, it was astonishing, so the officers said, to see how quickly order was restored by the power of discipline. For within one hour after the surrender took place the English troops had manned the walls, the prisoners were disarmed and placed under guard, and but for the appearance of the killed and wounded, and of the battered walls, all signs of a struggle had disappeared. At an early hour the shops were open, and the inhabitants of the town, of both sexes, were peaceably walking through the streets in pursuit of their various avocations.

But many most painful scenes were still to be witnessed as the people came to search for their relatives who had been amongst the defenders. Here a bereaved widow

might be seen wailing over the body of her husband; there a wretched mother mourned over that of her son. Many priests were giving the last offices to the dying. But such scenes are best left to the imagination.

It was estimated that this brilliant victory had cost the British about six hundred men in killed and wounded, while the loss of the garrison must have been more than double that number.

Such is the price of war!

CHAPTER XVI

A PLOT AND AN ESCAPE

NEXT morning Señor Rodriguez and his daughter took their departure for the shore in the captain's boat. Before saying good-bye Don Antonio again told Stephen he would never forget that he owed to him his life, and said that if at any time he should want a friend to assist him, he would be always at his disposal.

To the surprise of all on board, Señor Lopez announced that he did not intend to go ashore that day. What could be his purpose? Stephen wondered. There was nothing to detain him on board, and every reason why he should be anxious to get away.

"I fancy he must be up to some devilment," thought Stephen, and resolved to keep a close watch upon him. This, however, it was not so easy to do, as Mr. Carter soon afterwards called upon Stephen to assist him to get ready the necessary documents for landing cargo. In this occupation he was engaged for some hours. However, in the afternoon he caught sight of Lopez leaning over the bul-

warks at the main chains in close conference with two men of villainous looks in a shore boat, which apparently he had hailed when passing.

With suspicion strongly aroused, Stephen strolled, apparently carelessly, along the deck, with the object, if possible, of discovering what they were talking about. In this he was unsuccessful, as Señor Lopez, upon perceiving his approach, at once dismissed the boatmen with the remark, which Stephen overheard, and understood from the knowledge he had now acquired of Spanish, "You quite understand what you are to do. It is for to-night!"

Just before sundown the captain returned. He had apparently been celebrating the British victory whilst ashore, as he was in a condition such as Stephen had not seen him in since that well-remembered day when he had ordered Mick to be flogged. However, his disposition was not irascible, but jovial, and he seemed to wish to embrace everybody he met, as he staggered below.

As Mick and Sandy scrambled up the gangway ladder, the latter made a sign to Stephen, and when they came near enough, whispered a hurried request for him to meet them on the forecastle that night.

Dinner took place at the usual hour, but the captain did not make his appearance; he was asleep in his cabin, the steward said. This news did not astonish anyone who had seen him come on board. Señor Lopez seemed to be in a restless condition. He ate little, and soon left the saloon.

Stephen now thought he might have an opportunity to meet the two sailors, and learn what they wished to say to him. Previous to going forward he decided to stroll along the poop and see if the coast was clear. It was a still, hot night, and he observed that a thick fog had suddenly risen and enveloped the ship.

Just at that moment he fancied he heard the sound of

oars close alongside. Peering over the bulwarks, he believed that he could make out the outline of a boat creeping under the counter, but all was indistinct in the fog. Suddenly his attention was caught by what appeared to be a red spark of fire in the sea, just under the mizzen chains, and he thought he could hear a slight hissing sound.

In an instant the thought of Señor Lopez's suspicious actions flashed through his brain, and he concluded that some diabolical plot was about to be carried into effect.

"I must see what this means," he said to himself.

He jumped at once into the mizzen rigging, and, seeing that the fiery spot was still below, whilst the hissing noise was now quite distinct, he threw the tail of the main brace overboard and lowered himself over the side in order to gain a clearer view. When he had got down to the water's edge he was able to make out that some object like a small barrel was floating close to the ship's side, and from it had come the red spark which had first of all caught his eye.

Intensely alarmed, and seeing there was no time to be lost, Stephen lowered himself still further, until he was at length able to touch the keg with his foot and send it spinning away with a vigorous kick. Then he scrambled up the rope to give an alarm.

Almost before he got to the deck there was a terrific explosion which shook the ship from stem to stern.

A panic at once broke out, everybody rushing on deck, the companion ways being almost choked by men tumbling over each other in their fright. The captain at once made his appearance, but appeared to be quite dazed, and began swearing incoherently.

The commanding voice of the chief officer, however, soon restored order.

Stephen in a few hurried words explained what he had seen and done, and then excitedly cried:

"This is Lopez's work! Where is he? Seize him, the traitor!"

Search was immediately made everywhere for the Spaniard, but he was nowhere to be found, and it was therefore concluded that he had succeeded in escaping overboard into the boat which laid the mine, as, no doubt, he had previously arranged with his confederates.

"That man is a devil! an ungrateful hound!" cried Mr. Roberts. "This is how he pays us for saving his life. First he tried to run the ship aground, and now to blow her up."

Stephen fully agreed with him, and resolved, if ever he should come across the man again that he would give him a wide berth.

The carpenter reported that the ship was making no water, and an examination of the ship's side showed it had only been dinted by a few splinters. Being thus reassured, the crew soon became calm again, and returned to their posts or went below.

Stephen now thought that the time had come to meet his two sailor friends. The fog and darkness would enable him to slip forward unperceived. Though it was their watch below, the men were evidently keeping an eager look-out for him, for as soon as he approached the forecastle they came up. They drew him to an obscure part of the deck, where they spoke in whispers, Mick keeping a look-out for possible eavesdroppers.

"Are ye still in the same mind about leaving the ship?" anxiously enquired Sandy.

Stephen replied that he was, and he presumed that they had not altered their intentions. Upon hearing that that was so, he asked if they had formed any plans for getting away.

The Scotchman replied that they had not been able to

see their way until that afternoon, but that something had then happened which had given them an idea.

"Ye saw what the captain was like when he cam back?" said he. "Well, as he was lolloping about in the stern-sheets o' the boat, he dropped some of his papers, and, gathering them up in a muddling way, he did not notice this, which had slipped under the seat. What a piece of luck it was that I got it!"

So saying he produced a paper, apparently an official document. It was too dark to examine it, and too risky to strike a light, but Sandy soon explained that it was the "permit" which the captain had obtained that day from the officer in charge of the landing-place. Without such a document, whilst the city remained in a state of siege no boat would be allowed to land in daylight, whilst after dark only man-of-war boats on guard would be permitted near the mole.

"Mick and I have been talking the matter over," said Sandy, "and we hae made up our minds to clear out the morn, for likely we'll never again get such a chance. So if ye're comin' ye'll hae to mak' up your mind at yince."

For a brief spell a storm seemed to work in Stephen's breast. His rancour against the captain had long ago abated and almost died out. To leave the ship was to break away from his friends amongst the officers, who upon the whole had been kind to him. More than that, it was to abandon his career upon the sea, which was so fascinating, and to postpone indefinitely the prospect of returning to his dear mother. It was to cast his lot in a foreign land, amongst a people of different language and temperament, whose ways, even upon Don Antonio's partial showing, were not always the most attractive, and who were apt to regard an Englishman as an enemy. What dangers might he not have to face, what were his chances of success? But suddenly he remembered all that Don Antonio had

told him about the country, and above all, the image of Pepita rose before his mental vision. The few hours which had separated him from her had revealed to him that to be with her had now become essential to his happiness. This idea overpowered all other considerations, and led him to decide at once.

"Men," he said, "I'm with you! I shall be ready to start at the first chance."

No definite plan could be worked out that night, but they all resolved to keep each other in view as far as possible next day, and to keep a bright look-out for any opportunity which might present itself.

Next morning rose bright and clear, and it was evident that the day would be excessively hot. About nine o'clock the captain came on deck, looking rather the worse for his yesterday's outing. Having wished all a rough "Good morning!" he announced to Mr. Roberts that he did not intend to go ashore that day. He complained of a headache, and of feeling "rather under the weather", and ordered the awning to be put up over the poop, with curtains down on the side of the sun. Then, stretching himself on a long chair, he called to the steward to bring him a "refresher". The effects of this draught helped him to recover something of his ordinary manner. He told the chief officer and supercargo that there was nothing to be done in the way of unloading for a few days, until matters on shore had got into better order. Then he seemed to recollect suddenly that something extraordinary had happened on the previous night, and asked for an explanation.

The chief officer briefly related the occurrence.

The captain grew very much excited as he heard the story. "Where is Mr. Herrick?" he suddenly exclaimed.

Stephen came to his side.

"My lad," said Captain Sommers, "you have acted nobly, and I feel ashamed of myself. I have acted wrongly to you, but will you forgive me and take my hand?"

As Stephen grasped it he felt a qualm of conscience, knowing the determination he had come to, but again the thought of Pepita overmastered all other emotions.

Turning to Mr. Roberts the captain said: "We will have to keep a look-out lest these devils try the same trick again, and perhaps with better success. So you had better get out another boat, and keep both patrolling round the ship all night."

Orders were at once given to get out the long-boat, and a boom to moor her.

The men had just knocked off work for dinner, and the captain and officers had gone into the saloon to smoke, when Stephen, who happened to be sitting on the poop, suddenly noticed that Sandy and Mick were making signals beckoning him to them. Without a word he slipped off the poop and crept quietly forward.

"Now's our chance!" whispered Sandy excitedly, and, leading the way to the gangway, he pointed to the captain's gig, which lay below with the oars in it.

Without another word the men clambered quietly over the bulwarks and down the ladder into the boat. Stephen followed them silently.

They immediately cast off the painter and noiselessly pushed the boat towards the bows. Then they rapidly muffled the oars and gave way. Stephen went to the tiller.

They had observed that as the wind was blowing from the land, the *Adventure* lay bow-on to the shore. They therefore steered to keep the boat right in line with the axis of the ship, as by so doing they would probably get a good way off before being visible to anyone on the poop.

The view from there was also impeded by the side-curtains of the awning.

Things turned out just as they had expected, and they had got quite a hundred yards away before their departure was noticed. Then they heard a loud hail from the ship and orders for them to come back at once, to which they of course paid no attention.

Presently a signal was fired from the *Adventure*, followed in a few seconds by the hiss and crackle of a couple of rockets, and they could see men running out of the boom to the long-boat.

"There's nae great fear o' their catchin' us noo!" said Sandy. "I noticed that they hadn'a' put the oars in the long-boat."

And so it happened, their start had increased to about five hundred yards before their lumbering pursuer got away.

But there was no time to be lost. At such a time the men-of-war keep a bright look-out, and a signal-gun leads them to prompt action. At any moment they might be intercepted by a boat from the fleet.

"Keep cool, Mr. Herrick," said Sandy, who never lost his equanimity. "If they stop us, just say that there's been a bad accident on our ship, and that we are going to the shore for help. As you have got the permit, which I will now hand you, they canna dae onything to stop you."

Sandy's ruse proved effective when, a few minutes later, a man-of-war's boat hailed them.

Stephen sheered alongside, rapidly displayed his pass to the officer, and was allowed to proceed at once, in view of the alleged urgency of the case. Luckily, as Sandy and Mick had already been twice to the shore with the captain, they knew exactly how to steer for the landing-place.

At the mole they were challenged by a sentry, and had

to interview the naval officer in charge, but the showing of the permit and the same story got them through as before. The boat was quickly moored, and Stephen, followed by his two men, made at once for the town.

Through his knowledge of Spanish, Stephen was easily able to find his way to Señor Rodriguez's house in the Calle Real.

Don Antonio was amazed to see them, but at the same time expressed his delight and his admiration of their pluck and enterprise in deciding to try their fortune in his country. Doña Josefina also received them graciously, and Stephen fancied that there was a flush of pleasure on her countenance and a soft light in her eyes which betrayed more than ordinary emotion in meeting him.

Rightly or wrongly as he may have judged her feelings, he certainly knew that a thrill went through his whole frame as he clasped her hand in salutation.

CHAPTER XVII

A MONTEVIDEAN MANSION

THE house in which Don Antonio received them was large and handsome, built in quite a different style from those of England, but in that which they soon came to learn was universal in South America. It was but one story in height, with flat roof. Access from the interior to the street was gained by a wide arched passage, sufficiently broad to admit a carriage, which was closed by a massive gate of ornamental iron-work. Each window looking on to the street was also barred by massive iron railings, adorned with scroll-work. The principal apartments were

built round a square court-yard, styled the *patio*, Don Antonio told them; the *sala*, or drawing-room, looking out to the street, whilst the *comedor*, or dining-room, formed the opposite or rear end of the quadrangle. The best bedrooms formed the two sides. A veranda, or sloping roof, supported on light pillars, ran round the *patio*, to afford shelter to the inmates whilst passing from one room to another. The inner apartments had no windows, only glazed doors. The floor of the veranda and the whole of the *patio* were paved with squares of black and white marble, arranged alternately, but with a black band framing the court-yard. In the centre of the *patio* rose a carved white-marble structure, apparently the mouth of a well, surmounted by an arch of ornamental iron-work, from which hung a pulley and chain. Don Antonio explained that this was not a well, but was really an underground cistern of brick and cement, named the *algibe*, into which was collected all the rain-water which fell on the roofs.

Several tubs, painted green, each containing a small orange-tree, now laden with the golden fruit, stood in the *patio*. Also some flower-stands, on which were pots with beautiful flowers in bloom. Across the *patio* stout wires were stretched, from which, in the hot weather, a canvas awning could be suspended, thus making the *patio* a cool retreat, even in the height of summer.

A spacious archway led to a second quadrangle, round which were other bedrooms. In this *patio* an enormous grape vine had twined up the pillars of the veranda, and had been trained on to trellises to afford shelter from the sun's rays. Still farther from the street was a third *patio*, round which were the kitchen and servants' apartments.

The house was plainly, but handsomely, furnished, the tables, chairs, and sideboards, &c., being of some dark wood, massive, and elaborately carved. In place of carpets, straw

matting covered the floors, being better adapted for hot climates, and in the *sala* several rugs made from the skins of wild animals were spread. There were no fireplaces in any of the rooms.

Altogether the dwelling greatly impressed Stephen and the two sailors with an idea of Don Antonio's wealth. Doubtless more experienced eyes would have noted the absence of many comforts common in the homes of gentlemen in a similar social position in Europe, but at that time the intercourse between South America and Europe was so limited that even to the wealthiest many objects were unknown which they would probably have desired had they been aware of their existence.

The dinner to which Don Antonio, with Stephen and Pepita, presently sat down, the sailors having been accommodated in the innermost court, was typical of those generally served in this part of South America. First came the *sopa*, or broth made from beef, followed by the *puchero*, or fresh boiled beef served with plenty of vegetables and boiled heads of maize, and finally the *asado*, or roast beef. Bread was plentifully consumed, but potatoes were apparently unknown. Beef, so Don Antonio said, was the staple food of the country, varied occasionally by a fowl or an armadillo, the latter being a special delicacy. On the table were decanters containing several kinds of Spanish wines.

The place of tea or coffee, then rarely used in these Spanish colonies, was taken by an infusion of *yerba mate*, or Paraguayan tea, which is a universal beverage in South America. This is prepared by placing the crushed leaves of the plant into a little hollow black gourd, and then pouring boiling water upon it. It is imbibed through a tin or silver tube, the *bombilla*, and the gourd with its tube is passed from hand to hand, the same *bombilla* being used by all, which is at first rather repugnant to fastidious per-

sons. Usually a little kettle is kept boiling upon a charcoal fire in a *brasero*, or portable stand, and the hot water is passed by a little black servant, whose business it is to see that the kettle is always full and boiling.

The restorative qualities of the *yerba maté* are greatly extolled, and with much reason, throughout South America.

"Well, Don Esteban," said Don Antonio, when they were smoking their cigarettes after dinner, "I am glad, as I have said, that you have chosen to try your fortune in this country, which offers so many opportunities to an energetic young man, far greater than you would ever have had on board ship; but I cannot conceal from you that you are not yet free from the danger of having your plans frustrated. Monte Video is now under control of the English authorities, who have their own ideas of discipline, and if you are discovered here they will doubtless send you and your companions back to your ship at once, and place you at the tender mercies of the captain. So I propose to take you out to-morrow to my estancia, 'Las Cruces', about five leagues out in the 'camp'. Once out of the city, the English will, of course, have no power to interfere with you.

"There appears to be another danger threatening you," continued Don Antonio. "From what you have told me with regard to Señor Lopez, he seems to have become your vindictive enemy. Should he hear where you are, he may give you trouble, and out in the 'camp' you will find no police protection, so you will have to rely upon your own resources for defence."

Stephen said that he had no fears in that direction, more especially as he would have such doughty supporters as the Irish and Scotch sailors.

"You are quite safe here to-night," went on Don Antonio, "for no boat from the *Adventure* can land with the news of your flight without the 'permit', which you were lucky

enough to secure, and to-morrow some formalities will have to be gone through before they can get another, which will take time. I propose to-night to procure for you and your companions native costumes which will serve as disguise, and I shall order some tame horses to be brought to the house early in the morning."

Great amusement was afforded to Stephen and the two sailors, when they rose before daybreak, by their efforts to dress properly in the native costume, and it was only by the aid of one of the men-servants, himself a wearer, that they were at last successful. The dress consisted of, first, a loose woollen shirt, then wide cotton drawers (*calzoncillas*) reaching half-way down the leg, the lower edges being adorned with lace. Over the drawers is worn a woollen shawl, styled the *chiripá*, one corner of which is brought between the legs and carried up to the waist, the flaps being wound round the loins. The drawers are fixed by a silk girdle, and the *chiripá* secured by a broad belt of canvas, covered with fancy woollen embroidery and adorned with large silver buttons. In this belt a large sheath-knife is invariably carried. A jacket and sometimes a cotton waistcoat is worn, and over all the *poncho*, which is a large square of woollen material, usually woven with bright stripes round the borders on a dark ground. In the middle there is a hole through which the head is put, and the *poncho* hangs round the body, giving a perfect shelter from the rain whilst leaving the arms free. No better garment could be devised for horsemen. A broad-brimmed slouch felt hat and high boots completed the costume, the finishing touch being given by strapping on a pair of heavy spurs, with rowels quite three inches in diameter from point to point.

The sun had risen in brilliance under a bright blue sky when they set out. Don Antonio cautioned the Englishmen

to draw down the brims of their hats, so as to hide their features, and to take care not to speak, as their lack of knowledge of Spanish would obviously be out of keeping with their costume.

As they turned the corner of the first street the party came face to face with Señor Lopez, who seemed almost as if he had been watching the house. He saluted Don Antonio politely, and keenly scrutinized the others of the party with evident suspicion. However, he made no attempt to delay them. At the city gate Don Antonio showed a pass for himself and servants, which was in order, and they were allowed to leave without opposition.

Once into the open country, the horses broke into that gentle canter characteristic of South American steeds, which rarely trot. Don Antonio was riding a favourite pacer, that is, an animal which has been trained to move both legs on one side forward at the same time. Such horses are greatly valued in those countries.

The country was looking lovely, being literally carpeted with grass and wild flowers. No roads were visible, but only tracks leading over the wild, unfenced plains. Stephen observed that the formation of the land was, as Don Antonio had described it to him on board the *Adventure*, a series of long undulations, succeeding each other almost like ridge and furrow. It resembled the long ocean swell of the calm belts suddenly petrified, only the distance from crest to crest was much greater, and the height much less in proportion, for there was no elevation in sight which would be worthy of the name of a hill.

After a pleasant ride of a little over two hours they arrived at "Las Cruces" estancia house. They could have done the journey in considerably less time had the seafaring men been more habituated to horseback. As it was, it took Mick and Sandy all their time to keep their seats,

tame though the horses were. Mick also complained of the difficulty of steering "with the tiller ropes over the bow instead of the stern".

The estancia house was a large square edifice of one story, built of sun-dried bricks (*adobes*) and roofed with thatch, standing on the summit of one of the prairie rolls. Near it were some enclosures made with strong posts for folding the cattle (*corrales*). A few huts built of posts and wattle and thatch-roofed stood near, which were occupied by the peons on the estate. The inside of the house was as plain as the exterior. It was divided into several rooms by white-washed adobe partitions which did not go up to the roof, the rafters being visible everywhere inside. The floors were covered with flat red tiles, and there were no fireplaces. The furniture consisted of some roughly-made tables, chairs, and stools. Brackets for saddles, and shelves surrounded the walls. The beds were what is styled *catres*, merely a long camp-stool with pine-wood frame and canvas cover.

"You will not find much luxury here, my friends," said Don Antonio; "however, you will find by and by that it is rather better than most accommodation to be met with in the camp, and you young men will not, I am sure, mind roughing it for a time."

Don Antonio then introduced his guests to Don Francisco Muñoz, his foreman, or, "mayordomo", who with his wife looked after the estancia, and explained for their benefit that he was generally known by the familiar abbreviation of Don Pancho."

The meal which was now set before them struck Stephen and his companions as singularly plain, though it was not long before they learned that it was the ordinary and almost unvarying fare of the "camp". It consisted of only a large piece of beef roasted, which was served in

a capacious earthenware dish placed in the middle of the table. Each man had a plate and knife and fork before him, and each attacked the meat in turn, cutting off as much as he wanted and transferring it to his plate. The only accompaniments of the beef were salt and some hard biscuits; the latter seemed to the sailors to be even coarser and harder than ship-bread. There was not a single vegetable on the table. To Stephen, with his experience of country life in England, this seemed most singular, especially as he judged, from what he had seen of the soil, that it was perfectly adapted for culture.

Don Antonio, in answer to his enquiries, said that this was certainly the case, and that almost any kind of crop would flourish there; but he explained that the natives would do no sort of work which they could not perform on horseback. Hence there was not even a ditch dug on the estate, and even for the sinking of wells special men had to be sent out from the town.

Early in the afternoon Don Antonio returned to the city, wishing them every happiness during their sojourn on the estancia, and promising to let them know when the *Adventure* had sailed.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON AN URUGUAYAN ESTANCIA.

FOR over three months Stephen and his two sailor friends spent what appeared to them at first quite an ideal life on the estancia Las Cruces, and though Don Antonio from time to time, on his frequent visits, spoke of the enormous profits which were being made by the sale of the cargo of the *Adventure*, none of them ever regretted the

sacrifice they had made of their right to participate in these gains; nor would they have gone back to the ship had the captain offered to restore them to their positions without punishment, or having to forfeit their bonus.

The estancia was purely a cattle farm, sheep being at that time almost despised as a source of profit. Such animals of that species as then existed in the colonies produced a dirty slate-coloured fleece, more like coarse hair than wool; they were small "leggy" creatures with four and even six horns, the degenerate descendants of the native Peruvian merinos which had been brought overland centuries before. Consequently there was little work to do except at certain seasons of the year, when branding and parting took place.

In such a climate as that of Uruguay, cattle and horses can remain and thrive on the plains all the year round without shelter, and what principally occupied the time of the herdsmen was to see that the stock did not stray from the estate, there being no fences to restrain them.

Stephen and his friends entered heartily into the work of the estancia. Every morning they would be up at day-break, and after a draught of maté, accompanied perhaps by a hard biscuit, they would ride off with Don Pancho or one of his men to inspect the cattle. Half-wild as animals become under such conditions, and dangerous to men on foot, they are always respectful to horsemen. They were all driven in the early hours of each day to a certain spot, called the *rodeo*, where they were kept for an hour or two, and so well had they acquired this habit, that as soon as any of the herdsmen galloped, shouting, through the plain, the cattle would begin to run from all directions towards the *rodeo*, where they would remain for some time of their own accord. It was a wonderful sight to see this great mob. There were over eight thousand cattle on the estate,

but they were divided up into four herds, each with its corresponding rodeo, and the mayordomo with his party would visit them on successive days.

So soon as the cattle were allowed to separate, it was noticeable that they invariably divided themselves up into family parties led by an old bull.

The horses, of which there were about fifteen thousand, displayed a similar instinct. They formed themselves into parties, styled by the men, *mañadas*, each of fifty to a hundred animals, under the care of one stallion, who very jealously looked after his mares, and if any of them wandered, would at once follow and drive them home. Amusing sights were sometimes seen when a stallion would attempt to entice a mare away from another party. The patriarch of the family whose rights were being invaded was at once on the alert for their defence, and then a battle royal between the two stallions would ensue in which hoofs and teeth were freely used.

The inspection of the herd over, the party would return to the *estancia* house for breakfast, which consisted of the everlasting roast beef and hard biscuit, with only water to drink, followed by the cup of *maté*.

Immediately the meal was over, everyone would go to bed for the siesta, which lasted until the hottest hours of the day were over. The remaining hours, until supper-time just after sunset, were spent as fancy directed, and were often the most tedious part of the day. None of the peons could read or write, and by nature they appeared to be most indolent. They were all, however, inveterate gamblers, though they had nothing of any great value to stake; and games of various kinds filled up their evening hours.

To Stephen, soon after the first novelty had worn off, this kind of life soon became almost unbearable. The dis-

position which had led him to long to go to sea was undoubtedly, though perhaps unknown to him, based upon a desire for change and excitement amongst constantly varying scenes. To the sailors, who had for years been accustomed to be kept constantly at drudgery under the vigilant eyes of officers (who would have thought it a disgrace to them to allow a man to be idle for a moment), and who had often to go on short commons, such unrestricted idleness with plenty to eat seemed by contrast a paradise, and not being men of education, they had no intellectual wants to satisfy. They did not, however, altogether waste their time. By constant practice they soon became expert horsemen. Mick showed a special aptitude for riding, and he even ventured to break in some of the young horses.

This is done in a rough-and-ready manner in South America. The horse is lassoed by the neck and by the legs, and then thrown down, a saddle is fixed on, and a heavy bit thrust in his mouth, and he is then set free at the moment when the man jumps on his back. He is allowed to career at will over the plain, where he tries every artifice to throw off his rider, until finally, exhausted and defeated, he is ridden back to the corral, and is thenceforth considered tame. Sometimes most exciting scenes are witnessed, and the horse gets the better of the man, throwing him with great violence, but it is a work greatly delighted in by the gauchos.

Stephen also attempted this business with considerable success, but neither he nor Mick could rival the feat sometimes performed by Don Pancho to display his horsemanship. This was to hang by his arms from the top bar connecting the two gate-posts of the corral, into which a number of untamed horses had been driven. Round his neck would be hung a bridle with a very heavy bit. Then

the gate would be thrown open and the horses allowed to rush out. As they passed, the mayordomo would drop on the back of one, and then, seizing the bridle, bend over and force the bit into the animal's mouth and the straps over its head. Although he was riding bareback, none of the struggles or artifices of the horse could ever dislodge him from his seat, and he would soon bring back his steed completely under control.

In the use of the lasso and the bolas the Englishmen soon also became expert, and they rapidly increased their knowledge of the language until even Sandy, who said at first he was too old to learn, could converse with some fluency.

The life was not all monotony. There was plenty of excitement at the marking-time, when all young calves and foals had to be branded with the mark of the estancia by a red-hot iron. At these times the cattle were taken by lots into the corral, lassoed, and thrown down. Any found with the mark of other estancias were singled out and sent back to their owners.

Then came the slaughtering-time, when the superfluous animals were killed. There being no market for the flesh, the only valuable parts were the hides and tallow. The fatty parts were cut out and boiled in huge caldrons, the fuel used being the larger bones. The remainder of the carcass was left to the vultures, who swooped down in clouds from all directions as soon as an animal fell.

Sometimes the men would organize a partridge-hunt, principally with the object of varying their diet, for the partridges were so plentiful and so tame as to offer but little sport. All that had to be done was to circle round them a few times to confuse them, when they could generally be knocked on the head with the riding-whips, or be caught by a loop of horse-hair on the end of a stick.

An ostrich-hunt was, however, more exciting, and there were plenty of opportunities for it. Parties of horsemen would ride round and round the flock until they at last got near enough, say within fifty or sixty yards, when the *bolas*, composed of three stones fixed at the end of thongs about four feet long, would be cast, and the thongs, twining round the legs of the birds, would bring them down at once.

On Sundays the men from all the estancias round would flock to the *pulperia*, or combined country store and public-house, a square building of post and wattle with thatched roof, with a counter opening to the exterior at one end. Over this was a veranda for the shelter of the customers, and in front of it a strong pole supported about four feet from the ground. The sports there began by the various riders, as they arrived, trying to push each other's horses along the bar by main force. Then horse-races would be got up. The course never exceeded about two hundred yards in a straight line, the spectators taking their places, mounted, on each side. As such a short distance is no certain test of speed, the whole art of these races consists in one jockey—never more than two horses run—securing some advantage over the other at the start.

All sorts of artifices are adopted to obtain this, but as either rider can object to go on while traversing a certain marked space, some time is spent in getting what is considered a fair start.

Drinking was generally fast and copious, and many would be left on the field to find their way home next day.

Stephen and his friends would also seek for change by visiting the owners of neighbouring estancias. Hospitality to all comers was always given, but certain formalities had to be observed. Upon approaching a house, horsemen had to stop at a certain distance away, and give as a hail the words "Ave Maria!"

If the owner were at home he would come to the door and reply, "Sin pecado concebida!" (conceived without sin), and then invite the visitors to dismount.

The Englishmen soon learned that Don Antonio was right when he said that they would find the accommodation better at Las Cruces than at most other estancias.

For example, they found old Don Manuel Gonzales, who owned a much greater estate than Don Antonio, in a house built of adobe, thatched, and with only an earthen floor. Not an article of furniture was in the house, but a few horses' skulls used as seats. In the centre of the floor burned an open fire, the fuel being dried cattle-dung, and there was no chimney for the escape of the smoke. The fireplace was formed by a lot of shank-bones stuck into the earth to confine the embers.

Don Manuel was dressed like an ordinary peon, his boots being made from the skin of the leg of a colt stripped entire and moulded to the foot when warm, and his naked toes showed through them.

The dinner was now preparing. It consisted of a large piece of beef through which an iron rod (*asador*) had been run. One end of the rod was stuck into the ground in such a position as to allow the meat to hang over the fire. Occasionally the meat was turned and salt sprinkled over it. When it was done, the spit was pulled to a vertical position. Each, as his turn came, took hold of the beef with the left hand, then laid hold of a morsel with his teeth, and with his knife in his right hand sliced off a portion, cutting upwards.

It requires some dexterity to do this, as a man with a long nose might run the risk of cutting it off!

The Englishmen fought shy of the native plan, and contented themselves with taking their portions in their hands.

"Why don't you have a try at it gaucho fashion, Mick?"

said Sandy, as he glanced chaffingly at the Irishman's pronounced Milesian features. "Your nose could be in no danger."

"Well, maybe I would not stick in my teeth so deeply as a Scotchman," retorted his comrade.

As they were riding home that night, an event happened which indicated to Stephen that his enemy had not forgotten his existence.

They were careering along towards the estancia house, and were about to pass between two trees planted near the gate, when suddenly Stephen was swept from his horse and thrown heavily. At the same moment a set of *bolas* whizzed past his head. It happened that Sandy had borrowed Don Pancho's gun, and he let fly at the figure of a man on horseback dimly seen through the darkness. There was a sudden yell, and the sound of hoofs rapidly galloping away was heard.

"This was Lopez's work again," said Stephen, when he came to himself; "a lucky thing I was not alone!"

And he resolved never again to go out unarmed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAKINGS OF A NEW BRITISH COLONY

A FEW days later, Don Antonio visited the estancia and brought the intelligence that the *Adventure* had sailed for England. To Stephen this was most welcome news, since all obstacles to his returning to Monte Video were now removed. He was anxious to enjoy the pleasures of civilized life, and above all, though he did not venture to say so to Don Antonio, to see Pepita again.

Don Antonio gave him a cordial invitation to his town house, but intimated that the two sailors had better remain at the estancia until he could find something for them to do.

"You will find Monte Video greatly changed, Stephen," said he, "it has become quite like an English colony. The *Adventure* was only the first of a large number of British merchantmen, whose owners had taken up the same idea as hers, and there is now quite an array of English warehouses established in the principal streets of the town. The people of Monte Video have taken very kindly to their invaders, and one constantly meets Englishmen, military and civil, at the *tertulias* (parties) of the best families. I am sure no one has the slightest desire to drive your people away, as they did in Buenos Ayres.

"Of course the general has to be on his guard, in view of what happened on the other side of the river, and an incident occurred only this week which proves that vigilance is not unnecessary. It is reported that two spies have been taken up, upon whom papers were found clearly showing that a conspiracy has been hatching amongst some people in Monte Video in combination with the military party in Buenos Ayres. The plan was, it appears, that a large body of troops were to be landed from Buenos Ayres at Colonia, the nearest point on this side, and to march upon the city. They were to be admitted by their confederates at one or more of the gates. All the best people in Monte Video, however, seemed to be pleased that this discovery was made in time to frustrate the plot.

"By the way," added Don Antonio, "I happened to meet Señor Lopez the other day, and I was astonished to see that he had his head tied up. He told me that he had met with a singular accident, that a lasso came flying close to his head, when he was out in the "camp", and had nearly torn off one of his ears."

"More likely that it was a shot from Sandy's gun," replied Stephen, and he then related his recent narrow escape.

"That man will end badly," said Don Antonio.

Stephen found Monte Video just as Señor Rodriguez had described. Less than four months had wrought a wonderful transformation in the city. The streets were now kept clean, and a police force had been organized. Life and property seemed to be as safe as in Europe.

A splendid trade was being done by all the merchants, and every day new cargoes of goods were arriving from England, but the demand rose in proportion.

Never had society been so gay. The natives felt as if a load had been taken off their shoulders by the expulsion of the Spaniards. New careers were open to everyone who would work. Social functions took place every evening, at which the Englishmen were welcome guests. Don Antonio, from the esteem in which he was everywhere held, was invited out constantly, and, except when he was entertaining at his own house, he and his daughter, accompanied by Stephen, were nightly attendants at some tertulia. Stephen had never been so happy in his life.

The trial and probable fate of the spies was at this time the absorbing topic of conversation. Great was the excitement of Don Antonio and Stephen, though it can scarcely be said they were surprised, when they learned that one of the inculpated was no other than Don Ignacio Lopez, their quondam fellow-passenger.

At length it was announced that the sentence of the court-martial was that the two accused should be hanged.

A tremendous anxiety pervaded the whole community upon the morning appointed for the execution. A high gallows had been erected in the Plaza Mayor, the principal square of the city. All the troops of the garrison were drawn up near the spot, and stood in solemn silence.

Behind them gathered a vast crowd, amongst whom were many Englishmen. Every window overlooking the square was filled with spectators.

At length the rumble of muffled drums announced that the mournful procession was approaching. Stephen watched it with a sickening feeling of fascination. First came a strong guard, who were to surround the scaffold. Then a procession of monks loudly chanting the offices for the dead. Next the condemned men, who were blindfolded and manacled, seated upon hurdles drawn by asses. Near each walked a priest, who from time to time presented to their lips a crucifix to be kissed, all the time repeating the prayers ordered by the church for such occasions. Stephen noted that Lopez had his head bound with a bandage below the handkerchief which covered his eyes. He was altogether a ghastly-looking object, and the drawn skin of his cheeks showing beneath the bandages had turned almost to a greenish yellow.

Though a deathly feeling went through his heart, Stephen could not turn away his eyes.

At length the gallows was reached, the noose was passed over the necks of the trembling culprits, and they were made to mount the fatal ladder, while the priests ejaculated the final words of their prayers. The crowd awaited in breathless expectation for the drop to fall.

At this exciting moment the officer in command of the guard suddenly cried to the executioners: "Stop, here comes the general!"

From a distance there could be seen riding up to the spot Sir Samuel Auchmuthy surrounded by a brilliant staff.

What could it mean? Was he coming to gloat over the death of his victims?

He halted at the foot of the scaffold. The suspense of the spectators was painful.

In a loud voice the general cried: "You are pardoned!" He had arranged this dramatic scene to show at once his power and his clemency.

No words can describe the thrill, the revulsion which passed through the spectators upon hearing this announcement.

As for the spies themselves, they were so bewildered and overpowered by the reaction that they had to be carried away almost senseless.

The effect upon the multitude, and even upon the soldiers, was tremendous. In a few minutes there broke out from every direction loud cheers—"Viva le General Ingles, Viva los Ingleses, Viva!"

From that instant sympathies with the English were intensified in the breast of every native. No plot against them would have had any chance of success.

A few weeks later great excitement was created at Monte Video by the news, brought by a fast frigate, that a formidable expedition was on its way to the River Plate with the object of retaking Buenos Ayres and establishing British supremacy in the country. This expedition, it was announced, was under the command of Lieutenant-general Whitelock, and was bringing an additional force of over eight thousand troops, which, after allowing for the necessary garrison to be left at Monte Video, would enable the new British commander to land at Buenos Ayres at the head of over ten thousand men.

So confident was the British Government of success, that they had conferred upon General Whitelock the rank of Governor-general of South America (which, by the way, indicated that they knew little of that continent), with a salary of £12,000 per annum.

Doubtless the Government had some grounds for this assumption of an easy conquest, in view of the fact that

General Beresford had previously taken the place with only about sixteen hundred men.

There was much discontent in Monte Video when the name of the commander-in-chief became known. "Why Whitelock?" asked the officers. "He is utterly unfitted for such a command. We have plenty of better officers. Could they not have sent Sir John Moore or Sir Arthur Wellesley, or several others we could name?"

"Yes," said a gray-haired captain, "I served with Whitelock, then a colonel, on the San Domingo expedition, and well remember that he acted like a poltroon; in fact, his own men were quite ashamed of his manifest cowardice. And to send such a man to supersede our present brave commander, Sir Samuel Auchmuty! It's disgraceful."

"Ah!" retorted a corpulent major, "evidently you don't know all. There are 'wheels within wheels', as usual, and it is whispered that General Whitelock is a closer relation to persons in high places than is publicly acknowledged. That may account for a good deal."

In due course the expedition arrived. The general came on *H.M.S. Thisbe*, which was accompanied by a large number of transports bringing the troops. Next day he landed with great ceremony, followed by a gorgeous escort of aides-de-camp, adjutants, commissaries, and other officers. He had also a large retinue of personal servants.

He immediately took up his quarters in one of the best houses in the city, where he opened a court and held levees in almost regal style. Accustomed as they were even to the arrogance of Spanish officials, the inhabitants of Monte Video were quite taken aback by the high and mighty airs of the new English commander. "So different," said they, "from the brave and simple Sir Samuel!"

Nearly a month passed after the arrival of the expedition before a move was made to carry out its object, the time

being occupied with levees and receptions, parades and reviews of the troops. The people of Buenos Ayres were thus given ample warning and opportunity to prepare for the intended attack.

At length it was publicly announced that a start would be made on the 25th June, no care being taken to keep even that important fact a secret from the enemy.

"I have been talking confidentially to-day," said Don Antonio, "with one of the divisional generals, and he was lamenting the neglect of the commander to make arrangements to have some capable scouts. 'Not that that will be an easy thing to manage,' said he, 'because we could scarcely entrust such important work to natives, who might easily lead us into a trap.' A sudden idea occurred to me. Why could not you, Stephen, and your two sailor friends, volunteer for such work? You can all ride well now, and might at a short distance be easily taken for natives, so that you would be able to get into the enemy's lines and obtain information of the highest value to the English army."

Stephen gladly jumped at the idea, and assured Don Antonio that he believed that his friends would willingly accept the proposal. A messenger was at once despatched to Las Cruces to summon Sandy and Mick, and Don Antonio went to arrange for an interview for next morning.

"You quite understand the risks of the service you are about to undertake," said the general to Stephen and his friends next morning, "that, by the usages of war, scouts not in uniform have no quarter given them if captured."

Stephen and the sailors said they were quite ready to take that risk for the sake of the English cause.

"On the other hand," said the general, "services of this nature are always handsomely rewarded; so, if we succeed, you may count upon getting well paid."

The bargain was concluded, and they were given instructions when to get ready, and told upon which ship to embark with their horses, with which Don Antonio generously undertook to provide them.

"Ah!" said Don Antonio to Stephen as they came away, "I am afraid that the English are making a mistake. It would have been much wiser for them to have contented themselves with consolidating their power here in the Banda Oriental before attempting to conquer the other side. General Liniers, who is in command in Buenos Ayres, is not the man to allow himself to be beaten without resistance, and they will have a harder task than they expect. On the other hand, they are now in peaceful possession of Uruguay, a country larger than England, and the people are their friends. Why should they not be content with this for the present?"

CHAPTER XX

INCOMPETENCE AND ARROGANCE

IT was on the 25th of June, 1807, that the British expedition under command of General Whitelock proudly sailed from Monte Video for the conquest of Buenos Ayres amidst the cheers of the garrison and the English residents on shore. Grandly the great men-of-war spread their lofty sails as they moved out, followed by a long line of transports. The bands played merrily on each ship, and all were confident of an easy victory.

It was midwinter in these latitudes, and soon a cold pelting rain drove all who were not on duty to seek shelter below. Stephen and his friends, who had donned the native costume, were on one of the cavalry transports.

It should have been easy to reach the anchorage in front of Buenos Ayres and effect a landing close to the city by the next day. Great surprise, therefore, was expressed on board when the ships were kept beating about, and after having actually come within sight of the place, were steered southwards, so that the point selected for the landing was even farther away from the town than the spot where General Beresford had descended haphazard almost exactly a year before.

What could the commander be thinking of! wondered the officers. The people of Buenos Ayres had no forces which could withstand a direct attack. Why not have landed as near as possible? For some mysterious reason the orders were given to land near the port of Ensenada, at a distance of thirty-six miles southwards of Buenos Ayres. The shores were low and swampy, and the ships could not, on account of the shallowness of the water, approach within a long distance from the land. The naval officers were reported to have pointed out to General Whitelock that owing to this circumstance the ships would be unable to co-operate with the army in the attack, but the imperious commander-in-chief had told them to mind their own business.

It was a tedious and laborious work, that of landing an army of over eight thousand men, with all its horses, cannon, and stores, and it was not rendered less easy by the circumstance that the rain poured down pitilessly all the while. Stephen and his friends were amongst the first on shore, and they were ordered to go ahead to reconnoitre the route.

To their profound astonishment they found the land to be nothing but a vast swamp for miles, into which their horses sank at times almost up to the saddle-girths. No worse place could have been selected for landing an army. Who could have recommended it? Right and left they deviated, seeking a way out to firmer ground,

but, finding none, they had to come back and report the facts to their general.

"Well, there is no help for it now," said that officer; "the army is landed and must find its way out. I have no doubt we shall manage it somehow, as Britishers have the knack of doing, and always have done, even under worse circumstances."

And through it they did get, but at what a price of hardship and suffering! It took them no less than three days to cover a distance of about eighteen miles of continuous swamp. Across this had to be dragged some fifty pieces of cannon, and all the multifarious stores required for an army on the march. The toil was enormous and discouraging, especially as the commissariat broke down utterly, and for many hours, even entire days, the men were left without food or refreshment of any kind. For stretches of miles at a time the troops had to wade through water sometimes up to their waists. To get the cannon through was an almost impossible task, killing both to horses and men. At least three or four guns sank out of sight altogether and were lost. All the time the rain continued to fall. It was bitterly cold. At night there was no shelter. The men had to rest as best they could in their wet clothes. It was a marvel that any of them lived through it. But the conduct of the officers was admirable. With a self-abnegation beyond all praise they cheered and aided their men, displaying a courage and endurance far beyond that required to lead even the deadliest charge.

At length, after two days' farther march, all the troops were drawn up upon solid ground at a spot where even the veriest tyro could see they might have easily landed direct from the ships.

They were now within four miles of Buenos Ayres,

which was clearly visible, and had not as yet encountered the slightest resistance, at which they marvelled greatly, for it would have been easy to slaughter them wholesale as they were floundering through the marsh.

Once more were Stephen and his comrade scouts called upon to do active duty in reconnoitring. Cautiously they advanced, but for a mile or two the country appeared to be quite deserted. Only an occasional hut was seen, but the inhabitants had fled. At length they came within sight of the little river, the Riachuelo, about three miles from the southern boundary of the city, the same spot at which General Beresford had met the Spaniards the year before. They saw what appeared to be a formidable force of Spanish troops drawn up on the opposite bank.

This being reported to the general, the British troops were at once formed into order of attack. As soon as they came within view of the rivulet a regular panic appeared to spread through the ranks of the Spanish defenders. They broke up into a mob and fled helter-skelter towards the town.

Trusting to their disguise and to the confusion, Stephen's party at once plunged into the river, quickly crossed, and followed in the wake of the fugitives. They discovered, to their intense surprise, that the demoralized troops did not rally even when they had reached the town, but rushed on through it, leaving the city entirely defenceless.

Seeing this, Stephen at once gave orders to draw bridle and return to report to the general. The officer immediately communicated the intelligence to the commander-in-chief, and urged a general advance.

Had that advice been followed it is probable that the English would have taken Buenos Ayres that night without firing a shot or losing a man.

But no; General Whitelock issued a peremptory order

that the troops were to halt upon the position they had taken up until the following day.

During the night Stephen stole alone into the city. His venturesome mission was rendered less hazardous by the all-pervading excitement, and by the fact that from his appearance and naturally dark complexion he might readily have been taken for a Spaniard.

Having forded the river, he left his horse in one of the numerous hide-packing yards (*barracas*), from which the caretakers had fled through fear of the invaders, tying him up under a shed where he could readily find him again.

Stephen found the outer streets almost deserted, but as he got farther into the town he observed many people hurrying in one direction, talking excitedly. He mingled with the crowd, unobserved in the darkness and tumult, and he soon gathered they were making their way to the plaza, in which was the *cabildo*, or town-house, where the council was then in session debating the course they should take in the present critical circumstances.

The plaza was packed with an excited throng, all eager to learn as soon as possible the decision the authorities would come to. Slouching his hat over his face, and taking care not to attract attention, Stephen gradually worked his way round to the *cabildo*. The session-hall was on the ground floor, and was brilliantly lit up; the windows were open, so that it was easy to see what was going on inside, and those nearest could even hear the discussion.

The president, who sat at the head of the table, was a fine-looking old man, dressed in the fashion of the previous generation, tie-wig, ruffles, &c. His name, Stephen gathered from remarks in the crowd, was Martin Alzaga. At the moment when Stephen came within earshot he was evidently replying to some remarks which had just been made by an officer in full uniform who sat by his side, and

whom Stephen had no difficulty in discovering to be General Liniers, the commander of the Spanish garrison.

From the tone of Señor Alzaga's speech it was evident that the general had been urging the municipality to surrender and make the best terms possible, since it appeared that the troops had twice broken and fled precipitately that day at the mere sight of the enemy.

"I tell you no!" said the president. "Hope is not lost yet! Why have the English halted outside, unless it is because they are afraid? No! we shall not surrender so tamely, but let every man who can handle a pick-axe or spade be set to work to-night to dig trenches and make barricades across the streets, and let everyone who can fire a gun take his place on the flat roofs of the houses to-morrow morning and prepare to give a warm welcome to these heretical invaders!"

Loud cheers greeted these words in the council chambers, and they were frantically received in the plaza, as the import of the resolution became known.

In his eagerness to hear every word spoken within, Stephen had come within the zone of the light from the windows, and his hat had been pushed back from his face. Suddenly he felt himself touched by the collar, and the terrible words rang out: "Ha, a spy! An Englishman! Death to him!"

Quickly glancing up, Stephen recognized his assailant to be Señor Lopez, whose face was contorted with rage.

Shaking himself loose from his grasp, Stephen struck out from the shoulder with such force as to throw Lopez to the ground. In an instant the Spaniard had drawn a pistol and fired it at Stephen, fortunately, however, missing his aim. Almost as quickly Stephen had drawn his double-barrelled pistol, which he now always carried, and returned the fire.

The report of the shots and the cry of "Un Inglés!" produced a sudden panic among the crowd, which, but a moment before, had been applauding the bold proposals for defence. Some seemed to imagine that the English had actually forced their way into the city in the darkness, and were about to massacre them, and rushed off in great excitement. In the confusion which ensued it was an easy matter for Stephen to get away, and he did not cease running until he came to the place where he had left his horse.

It was but the work of a minute to mount and gallop towards the rivulet, which he forded rapidly, and within half an hour he was at his general's tent. There he rapidly related what he had learned of the state of the town and the proposals of the president of the cabildo.

"There is not a moment to be lost!" exclaimed the general. "We should march in at once and take possession. I must see General Whitelock immediately!"

So saying, he mounted his horse, which stood ready saddled, and rode off to the quarters of the commander-in-chief.

In about an hour he returned, evidently in a state of great irritation.

"Well, sir, what news?" asked an aide-de-camp.

The general seemed as if he were about to explode.

"Well, of all the—but the matter is too serious to talk lightly about. What do you think? I was told by the commander's orderly that "General Whitelock had gone to bed, and had given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed on any account, as he was not feeling very well!"

CHAPTER XXI

MARCHED TO DESTRUCTION

NEXT morning the English troops were in momentary expectation of receiving the order to advance. The precious opportunity of making a night attack, which would certainly have been successful, had been lost, but as the defenders appeared as yet to have taken no action, there seemed nothing to prevent the invaders from marching in without meeting with serious resistance.

As hour after hour went past without any orders being issued, the agitation became great in the camp. Men asked each other what could be the meaning of this senseless, inexplicable delay. Presently a rumour spread through the troops to the effect that General Whitelock had not yet risen. He was, it was said, suffering from the effects of a chill caught in the march through the marshes, which had given him a headache, and rendered him unfit to attend to business. It required all the force of military discipline to restrain the men in their stations, and prevent them from rushing forward without orders.

If the commander-in-chief was incapable of attending to his duties, his divisional generals were not idle. From daybreak they had been in the saddle, surveying the topography of the place to be attacked. They saw at once that there were two elevated spots (now known as the Alto and the Retiro) from which artillery could command the city, and, in fact, have it at their mercy. They observed, also, that it would be no difficult matter to completely invest the town should it be thought necessary to take it by siege, and they knew that they had amply sufficient troops for the purpose.

It was reported that the generals had gone in a body to the commander-in-chief, and proposed to him that he should at least send artillery to take possession of the heights, and move some battalions round to the north so as to be able to conduct an attack from two directions at least, if he decided to take the place by storm.

But General Whitelock had, it was said, replied that he had his plan, which would be made known to them in due course, and he did not require their advice.

So all that day the troops stood in enforced inaction. The position was most trying, especially as through the telescope the inhabitants could be seen everywhere, like an army of ants, busy erecting barricades across the streets, and placing sand-bags for shelters on the house-tops.

In the afternoon General Whitelock, who had apparently got somewhat better from his indisposition, sent in an officer with a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the city and the disarming of the inhabitants. The answer sent by the heroic Martin Alzaga was a decided refusal, with the further message to the English general: "If you want our arms, you must come and take them".

Next morning (July 5th) General Whitelock issued a general order to the army, announcing his determination to take the city by storm, and setting forth his plan of attack. This was, that about one-half of the forces were to march to the centre through four separate parallel streets, while the remainder were to remain as reserve, under the immediate command of the general commander-in-chief, and of these latter 2000 were to march back to take up a position about six miles away, near the village of Quillmes. The order, which was couched in the magniloquent language for which General Whitelock was notorious, concluded with the following remarkable sentence: "As the plaza was the scene of the British capitulation under General Beresford,

so will the plaza be the scene of British retributive vengeance and victory! No shot shall be fired until that spot is reached!"

In order to make the last point of this order effective, instructions were given to the divisional commanders to see that the troops under their command marched in with their arms unloaded. As if afraid that even this precaution might not be sufficient to restrain the ardour of some of the regiments, whose fighting instincts might overcome their discipline, the general ordered that those more spirited, and the Connaught Rangers in particular, should unscrew and remove their gun flints.

No words could describe the general consternation which spread through all ranks of the army upon their learning of the insensate plan, and, realizing the astounding incapacity of a commander who could dictate such an order, men felt as if a sentence of death had been pronounced upon them; for what but certain destruction could result from a march in a defenceless condition through more than three miles of narrow streets, the flat roofs of which would be swarming with marksmen firing through loopholes behind the safe protection of sand-bags and parapets.

Such, however, is the power of discipline in the British army that the troops were at once drawn up in accordance with the order. The divisional commanders were as white as death, as they reluctantly gave their orders, but they felt that with such a man as Whitelock remonstrance would be useless.

It was broad daylight when the columns started, and their approach could be seen by the defenders from afar. As if to give the enemy ample notice of their approach, and to prepare for them, General Whitelock gave orders for a salute of twenty-one guns to be fired in honour of the victory about to be won.

The streets of Buenos Ayres cross each other at right angles, at regular distances of 150 yards apart, and are about 18 yards wide. The houses were then all one-storied, with flat roofs, protected by parapets about three feet in height. Across each street barricades had been made, consisting of deep trenches, the earth from which had been thrown up to form a bank on the side towards the town. These were revetted with planks or sand-bags, so as to present an almost perpendicular face to the assailants.

To attempt an attack under such conditions, and in the method adopted by Whitelock, was simply to send men into the lion's mouth.

The British troops were mowed down by hundreds before they even got beyond the outskirts of the city. It was not a battle, but simply a massacre.

Nevertheless, the English pressed on undauntedly, though their comrades were falling round them in heaps. The different columns soon lost sight of each other, and could render no mutual support.

The division which Stephen accompanied soon carried a barricade at the point of the bayonet, and, at last disregarding the order of the commander-in-chief, they loaded their muskets to retaliate on the enemy. After a headlong rush past several blocks of buildings they came upon a church. With the butts of their muskets the soldiers in a few minutes crashed in the portal of the great door, but not before the street in front was strewn with fallen men. Once in the church, they had a breathing-space. The colonel at once placed men at the windows, on the roof, and up in the tower, from the balconies of which they could dominate the neighbouring houses.

It was now most important to acquaint the commander-in-chief with the position. The colonel turned to Stephen, who hitherto had escaped unhurt, though his horse had been shot down almost at the outset.

"You will be the best messenger," he said; "a man in uniform would have no chance. There is no time to be lost. Rush off at once, and report to General Whitelock how we stand. May God preserve you, and get you through! All our lives depend upon your safe arrival. Lose not an instant!"

It was a perilous errand, but Stephen did not flinch. What was his life compared to the safety of the whole regiment, and the success of the expedition?

He went through the sacristy, and out by the private door used by the priests. As he had anticipated, he found no difficulty in getting away. The defenders of the city were an undisciplined mob, and acting under no general plan, so their curiosity and attention were altogether centred upon the streets through which the English soldiers were passing.

Making a detour through back streets, Stephen had nearly reached the outskirts, when suddenly he saw three men on horseback riding towards him. In an instant he saw it was General Liniers, followed by two aides, who were going from one part of the defence to another to see the progress of events. As soon as they spied him they shouted to him to halt, probably believing him to be either a messenger or a deserter.

Stephen knew that they would not for a moment be deceived if he parleyed with them. Nevertheless, he slowed down his pace as if he intended to speak with them. But so soon as they were within a few feet, he made a sudden rush between two of them and bolted off at the top of his speed.

With a cry of surprise and an oath, as his horse, startled, nearly threw him off, one of the officers turned, and seeing that the fugitive paid no attention to his orders to stop, at once drew a pistol and fired.

Stephen felt as if a whip had struck him, and instantly his right arm fell helpless at his side.

Presently he came to a side street, and just round the corner, out of sight, a wide gate stood open before him. Through it he dashed. He found himself in one of the yards for packing hides. He rushed into a shed and behind a pile of skins, where he lay panting.

In a few moments he heard the sound of a horseman riding up to the gate, and the cry: "Where can the rascal have got to?" followed by the words, evidently from the general, "Come along, captain! We have no time to waste in hunting for him. He may be only a simple peon, frightened at soldiers!" Then the sound of the hoofs intimated that the general's party had ridden off.

Relieved at his escape from present danger, Stephen at once decided to go on, remembering the urgent necessity for haste. But his wound was now become exceeding painful, and he felt sick and faint. He had been shot just above the elbow, and blood was flowing freely. He bandaged his arm as tightly as he could, with a strip ripped from the edge of his poncho; then, with his knife in his left hand, he cut a narrow slip of hide, which he fashioned into a rough sling to support it.

He slipped out of the gate, but met with no one, so that he was able to resume his journey unopposed; but now he felt so ill and giddy that his progress was much slower, and he had to stop from time to time to rest.

At length, after what appeared to him to be a period of hours, he reached the banks of the Riachuelo. How to cross it was a problem. Fortunately no one was in sight to stop him. He suddenly saw a short plank, such as was used to put under a barrow wheel to keep it from sinking into the mud. With great exertions, impelled by the energy of despair and the thoughts of the comrades who were depending upon him, he at length managed to push it into the water. Then, plunging in, he lay on his back in the stream, put his left arm over the plank, and struck out with his legs. In a short time he managed to come within

soundings on the opposite bank of the narrow river, and struggling to his feet with great efforts, he was able to work through the mud and on to the firm land, where he had to lie down for a while in utter exhaustion. Again he rose to his feet and staggered on. He was nearly in a fainting condition when he at last reached the British outposts. In a few words he explained his errand to a sentry. The officer of the guard was at once informed. He made two soldiers lift Stephen up and place him on his horse, and, leaping up behind him, rode towards the tent of the commander-in-chief.

General Whitelock was seated at a table with a map of the city before him. He was, as usual, surrounded by a numerous staff of aides-de-camp. Stephen's conductor explained how he had found him, and his story that he was the bearer of an important message from Colonel Duff.

General Whitelock looked at the young man for a few seconds superciliously. Covered with mud, blood-stained, and his clothes dripping wet, Stephen was conscious that he was not a pleasing object for so fine a gentleman to contemplate.

"Where are your despatches?" demanded the general haughtily.

Stephen explained in stammering words that he had none. He explained that the colonel had been too busy and too desperately occupied to write, whilst the carrying of a written despatch would have greatly added to the danger of his mission.

To his horror the general abruptly replied: "I can pay no attention to messengers not properly accredited." Then turning to his staff, he said, "Take him away. How can I tell, dressed as he is, that he is not a spy."

"Great God!" cried Stephen, as he sank fainting down. "Are these poor fellows, then, to be left to their fate?"

CHAPTER XXII

IGNOMINIOUS SURRENDER

AS the day wore on, and messenger after messenger brought evil tidings, the general could no longer conceal from himself the utter failure of his plans. He heard how regiment after regiment had capitulated after being nearly cut to pieces, whilst the few who still held out were being closely besieged in the churches or other public buildings, and were sorely beset.

Instead of rising to the occasion, however, he seemed to entirely lose his head, and to sink into a lethargy of abject fear and cowardly collapse. He neither despatched orders to those in front to retire, nor ordered up the reserve, though he had more than five thousand men who had not yet taken part in the fight, and who were burning to go to their comrades' aid.

Gradually the sound of the firing spattered out, and night closed in silence and gloom over the British camp.

At daybreak next morning, a party, headed by an orderly bearing a flag of truce, was observed to be coming from the town to the English head-quarters. When it arrived, the messenger was found to be an English officer bearing a despatch from General Liniers to General Whitelock. In this the Spanish commander reported that he had taken prisoner eighty officers and upwards of a thousand men, and that more than double that number had been killed and wounded, whilst the few that still held out were completely in his power; he therefore suggested, in the name of humanity and to avoid further effusion of blood, that the English should surrender. "As a proof of Spanish generosity," wrote General Liniers, "I offer to your excellency that, if you choose to re-embark with the remainder of your army, to evacuate Monte Video and the

whole of the River Plate, leaving me hostages for the execution of the treaty, I will not only return all the prisoners which I have now made, but also those which were taken from General Beresford. At the same time I think it necessary to state, that if your excellency does not accept this offer, I cannot answer for the safety of the prisoners, as my troops are infinitely exasperated against them, and the more so as three of my aides-de-camp have been wounded while bearing flags of truce; and for this reason I send your excellency this letter by an English officer, and shall wait your answer for one hour."

The indignation which burned in the minds of the officers of the staff when they heard these words may be imagined.

But General Whitelock, who still seemed to be quite dazed, dismissed the messenger with an evasive reply, without indicating his intentions. The time stipulated in the despatch having elapsed, the party returned to the town without a reply.

Within a short time thereafter the sound of firing announced that the combat had been renewed. A little later a messenger arrived with a despatch from Sir Samuel Auchmuty, stating that he was holding the Retiro, and had just driven back the Spaniards with great slaughter and captured two guns. He urgently asked for reinforcements, which, if sent at once, might, he said, still save the situation.

Still General Whitelock gave no answer, nor did he order up the reserve.

In the afternoon he sent a general officer to Liniers with an intimation that he surrendered upon the terms proposed.

That very evening news was brought of the arrival of another British fleet at Monte Video, with reinforcements of 2000 men.

But it was too late!

So concluded the most ignominious surrender of modern days. A dishonour to British arms it was, but the character

of British soldiers for valour was not stained. The sole responsibility will ever remain upon the shoulders of Whitelock, the most incompetent and cowardly commander who ever disgraced the British uniform, and of the government who appointed him.¹

After twelve days occupied in shipping the war material, stores, horses, &c., the survivors of the defeated and disgraced British expedition sailed from Buenos Ayres to Monte Video. There they resumed the life which had been led before the attack. The people of Monte Video were kinder and more hospitable than ever, and it was noticeable that they showed no exultation over the victory of the Spaniards, nor ever alluded to it in the presence of English officers. Universal regret, almost consternation, had been felt in Monte Video at the news that that place was also to be evacuated. An address was drawn up to Sir Samuel Auchmuty by the cabildo (municipality) of Monte Video, spontaneously testifying to the meritorious conduct of the British garrison and authorities during the seven months' occupation, and expressing regret at their departure.

The conduct of General Whitelock at this juncture disgusted everybody. Instead of being humiliated before his gallant comrades, he put on more airs than ever, and strutted the streets as though he had been the hero of a hundred fights. He resumed holding his levees and receptions, to which, however, no one went unless compelled by orders.

¹ Spanish historians assert that in General Liniers' original draft despatch no mention was made of Monte Video. "Put in," said Senor Alzaga, the president of the cabildo, or mayor, "put in 'that he shall also evacuate Monte Video'." "Oh!" said General Liniers, "that is out of the question, it would spoil the whole matter." "Let us put it down," replied the resolute mayor, "it can be easily taken out if objected to." It was put down, and it was not objected to. Upon his return to England, General Whitelock was tried by court-martial, and the judgment against him was that "he be cashiered, and declared totally unfit and unworthy to serve His Majesty in any military capacity whatever". Many of the public thought he should have been shot, and that he was only saved on account of his high connections.

For some time afterwards there was a common toast in England: "Success to gray hairs, but bad luck to white locks".

At length, on the 9th September, he handed over the keys of the fort to the Spanish governor, General Elio, and the British fleet set sail, laden with dispirited and disappointed soldiers and merchants.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT NEXT?

STEPHEN had spent several days in the hospital at the camp near Buenos Ayres, suffering from the effect of his wound and exertions, which had thrown him into a fever, but was unable to get out of bed by the time the fleet sailed for Monte Video.

Upon his arrival at that city Don Antonio at once invited him to his house, and asked him to stay there until his health was completely restored. As for Sandy Fulton and Mick Scanlon, they asked for nothing better than to be allowed to return to the estancia Las Cruces, to which Don Antonio readily consented.

The departure of the English from the River Plate was a heavy blow to Stephen, as it cut off the prospects he had entertained of being able to make his fortune in a new and rising British colony.

To Señor Rodriguez the disappointment was scarcely less great.

“Ah!” he said, “the troubles which I foresaw were coming to my country when I resolved upon my proposed visit to Europe will now, I fear, arrive more rapidly, and be upon a yet larger scale. Spain is, as you may have heard, in a most deplorable condition at present, owing to internal dissensions; and the Government, even if they had time to take an interest in the affairs of the colonies, are too much endangered by threats of revolution at home to

be able to spare forces to keep order in their outlying possessions. The recent events in Buenos Ayres have revealed to the people their power, for though General Liniers is in the Spanish service, most of his soldiers in the battles with the English were colonial born, and now that they have, as they think, conquered a strong European power, it is not likely that they will submit much longer to the domination of a weaker, especially when the yoke is so galling as that of Spain. Therefore the ideas of independence which have been rising slowly in men's minds for some years will now gather force, and lead to action. I am myself strongly in favour of independence, but I can see that the country is not yet in a condition to undertake self-government with success. Under the guidance of the English all might have gone well. As it is, I can see nothing before us now but long years of anarchy. As a matter of fact the Spanish colonies are not, nor will they ever be, nations. They are composed of very dissimilar peoples inhabiting the same country. One does not need to go far to see that. You have already had some little experience in the 'camp', and you may have observed how very different are the people there from those of the towns, although only a few miles apart. Take, for example, my neighbour, Don Manuel Gonzales, whose house you have visited. The lives, dress, habits, and ideas of such people are all quite different from those of the townspeople, who have become, to a certain extent, civilized under the influence of the Spaniards. But if a rising against Spain takes place, it is the country people who will dominate. They have the men who will form the fighting force under their control; in fact the gauchos will fight only for their patron, and will care very little what the fight is about. What could the townspeople do against such men? But, again, the country land-owners are utterly ignorant of politics, or anything else outside of their ordinary life, and living, as they do, generally leagues apart, there is no

union or sympathy between them. Even the aboriginal Indians of our plains are better organized. They have their tribes and chiefs, and understand at least the rudiments of government, whereby some have to submit to the restraint of authority for the general good. Therefore I foresee nothing but anarchy before us."

Don Antonio's fears proved to be only too well founded. Many weeks did not elapse after the English had left before news began to come in of disturbances in all parts of the country. In Buenos Ayres and Monte Video it was observable that lawlessness and violence had greatly increased amongst the lower orders. Men who had been engaged in the excitement of fighting did not readily go back to the humdrum, monotonous life of the estancias. It was specially notable that drunkenness had become much more usual in Monte Video; many attributed this to the example of the British soldiers and sailors. Money must be had to carry on such a life, and consequently robberies became alarmingly frequent. At length it was not safe to go about the streets after dark.

In view of the state of affairs, which appeared likely to grow worse, Don Antonio one day announced to Stephen that he had resolved to leave Monte Video for a time and take up his residence on his estate on the other side of the river, about twenty leagues inland from Buenos Ayres. "There," said he, "we shall at least be free from the danger of meeting these ruffianly classes, and be able to watch the progress of events from a peaceful haven."

Don Antonio had, as a speculation, bought a flock of about a hundred English sheep, which had been brought out on a ship during the British occupation of Monte Video. These he had sent to Las Cruces, and placed under the special care of the two sailors, who, he thought, would be more reliable than the native herdsmen. He now resolved to take the flock to his estancia in Buenos Ayres, which he thought would suit them better. "There are finer grasses

there," he explained, "and, in fact, the country seems specially adapted for sheep. I see no reason why in the course of time the products of our sheep should not be quite as valuable as those of our cattle and horses, or even more so."

So Stephen was despatched to Las Cruces to instruct Sandy and Mick to drive in the sheep to Monte Video upon a certain day, when Don Antonio had arranged to have a schooner waiting to convey the whole party to Buenos Ayres.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PAMPAS. A GAUCHO TRACKER

THE estancia house at "El Porvenir", Señor Rodriguez's estate in the province of Buenos Ayres, was almost exactly like that at Las Cruces, which has already been described, but the aspect of the surrounding country was very different. Instead of the rolling prairie of the Banda Oriental, here there was nothing but level plains as far as the eye could reach. If the former resembled the long swells of the sea in a storm, the latter was exactly like an ocean in a dead calm. The limit of the view was an unbroken line like that of the horizon at sea. The soil was a rich alluvium, not even a pebble was to be found for miles, carpeted with unbroken pastures, the verdure of which, in spring and summer, was variegated by the hues of countless flowers.

Here Don Antonio and his daughter, Stephen and the two sailors, took up their abode, and soon fell into the routine life of the "camp", which differed in no wise from that at the Uruguayan estancia, except that, inasmuch as there were no streams on these pampas, water had to be constantly drawn for the live stock. This was done by a simple

apparatus, consisting of a large bucket made of hide, about five or six yards long, and open at both ends. Over the well was a framework, from which was suspended a pulley, through which a long hide rope was passed, one end being secured to the bucket and the other end fastened to a horse. The bucket being lowered into the well, a boy would mount the horse, and, riding away for a little distance, draw up the bucket, which came up doubled in the shape of a horse-shoe, with both ends uppermost. The adjustment of the rope was so accurate that when the horse had reached the extreme point, one mouth of the bucket would lean over a trough into which it emptied itself; then the boy would ride back to the well and repeat the operation. Hour after hour would be spent in this monotonous task, one of the most laborious on the estancia.

The mayordomo, or manager, of the estate, Don Cayetano Perez, was in many respects a remarkable man. He was about fifty years of age, his long black beard and hair being tinged with gray, but he was apparently as strong and active as many men twenty years his junior. Don Antonio told them that he had, in his earlier years, led the life of a wandering gaucho, which term is more properly applicable to such homeless bedouins of the pampa than to the peons settled on one estate, and that he was an adept in all the craft of the plains.

If he were asked the direction to any particular place, or where any one of the herds was now grazing, he would unhesitatingly point out the bearings, and, if required, guide the party to it without deviating from the straight line. This faculty seemed to the sailors most marvellous, accustomed as they were to rely upon a compass for direction; but Don Cayetano had never seen a compass, nor would he have known how to use it.

Don Antonio told still more surprising stories of his capabilities. "For example," said he, "let an article be placed, or even buried, at any spot on the plains in his

presence, and weeks or months afterwards he will take you direct to the place without a blunder. I have even been with him on the pampa when night has overtaken us, but he was never at a loss to find the way. He would jump off his horse and taste the pasture, and be able to tell at once where we were. But this is no uncommon accomplishment among such men of the plains."

It was not long before they had an opportunity of witnessing another aspect of Don Cayetano's wonderful powers. Some horses, including a favourite of Don Antonio's, had been missed from the estate, and the mayordomo went to look for them, accompanied by Stephen and some of the peons. Suddenly the leader cried: "This is no simple straying, the horses have been stolen! See, there are the tracks of some strange horses, which were mounted, and have been driven round our lot."

To uninitiated eyes, like those of Stephen, no signs were visible, and such keen-sighted observation seemed almost supernatural. Without hesitation Don Cayetano began following the trail at a pace that the others could scarcely keep up with. When he had gone on for some leagues, he said: "I can see that they are making for the Laguna Chica, where they will probably camp. Ah! here they halted for a short time!"

After another stretch he turned to some of his men, and directed them to ride off as rapidly as they could, and to make a circuit so as to come on the other side of the lagoon.

"You will probably find the troop of horses there," he said, "and you need not be afraid, as there are only two thieves, who will most likely make off as soon as they see you."

It turned out just as he expected, and that night Don Cayetano had the satisfaction of driving back to the estancia the stolen horses.

Speaking of this exploit to Don Antonio, Stephen expressed his great astonishment at the marvellous feat.

"Pooh! that was nothing for Cayetano," said Don Antonio. "He has been known to do much cleverer things than that. Why, once when he was away on a journey his best horse-trappings were stolen from his house. His wife noticed a footprint on the dust, which she took to be that of the thief. She covered it over with a tray. Two months later Cayetano came home and looked at the footprint, which by that time had become blurred, and could scarcely have been made out by other eyes. He said nothing more at the time; but a year and a half later, as he happened to be walking through a street on the outskirts of Buenos Ayres, he suddenly started, and went off on a jog-trot with his eyes on the ground. He turned into a house, and there he found his trappings, by that time blackened by use and nearly worn out, and the man in the house dared not deny the robbery. Cayetano was at one time greatly in request by the officers of justice when in search of a criminal, and his testimony was always accepted in a court of law without question. You may have heard that one of the best ways of throwing a tracker off the scent is that of walking through water for some distance. But no fugitive could ever manage to deceive Cayetano. He would 'reconstitute' the scene as if he were witnessing it, surprising the onlookers by his remarks. 'Ah! you would, would you?' he would cry. 'So you passed here on tiptoe, did you? and then you took to the water.' 'Here is where you came out. Ah! why did you not think about these droppings of water on the grass?' and so on. Once he tracked a man into a vineyard surrounded by mud walls. 'He is in there,' he said to the soldiers. 'Now your work begins, mine is done. I need not wait longer.'

"The soldiers searched until they were tired, and then sent to Cayetano to say that they could not find him. 'He is still there; he has not come out,' retorted the tracker, who would not take the trouble to make a second investigation; and he was right, for the man was captured soon after.

But," continued Don Antonio, "there are plenty of men in the country who are almost as clever trackers as Cayetano. I was once riding up near San Luis, when my guide suddenly cried: 'There was a very nice little Moorish mare in that troop which passed yesterday. She belongs to Don Nicolas Zapata, and probably he was riding her, as she was evidently saddled.' Upon reaching the town I found that what my guide had said was absolutely correct, though he had not seen the mare for more than a year. But the guide was only a mere herdsman, and nobody thought his feat anything out of the common."

CHAPTER XXV

A MYSTERIOUS GUEST

THEY had been at the estancia for some months without any extraordinary incidents happening, when one evening, just after sunset, as they were about to sit down to supper they heard the hail of a traveller—"Ave Maria!"

Don Antonio went to the door and gave the usual response, "Sin pecado concebida!"

The stranger, to the surprise of all, did not ride up to the house at once, but, keeping as far as possible in obscurity, said in a low tone: "Is it you, Antonio? Are you alone?"

"Yes, it is I," replied Don Antonio. "Who is it?"

The traveller came forward, and was at once recognized by Señor Rodriguez as Señor Padilla, a gentleman with whom he had long been acquainted. With him came another gentleman, also a friend of Don Antonio, a Señor Lima.

"Welcome, señores!" cried Don Antonio. "Pray dismount and come in."

"Are you alone?" they queried.

"Only my daughter is in the house, and this young English gentleman, my friend," said Don Antonio.

"Ah! an Englishman! Then we may come in."

"Why all this mystery, gentlemen?" asked the host.

"Because," said Señor Padilla, "we are escorting one the Spaniards would like to lay hold of. But as we are among safe friends we need take no further precautions." So saying, he rode off, but returned in a few minutes, followed by two gentlemen, whom he at once took into the house, and promptly shut the door behind them.

"Don Antonio, my friend," said he, "let me introduce to you, and beg your hospitality for, his excellency General Beresford and his friend Colonel Pack!"

To say that Don Antonio was profoundly astonished would scarcely describe all the feelings of excitement, apprehension, and even alarm which instantly arose in the mind of the host. But he soon recovered his self-command, and courteously placed his house at the disposal of his unexpected guests.

"Pray, seat yourselves at the table, gentlemen," he said.

The travellers needed no second invitation, and it was soon evident that they were almost famishing.

Supper over, and the visitors having enjoyed a refreshing wash, Señor Padilla told his story, while the English officers, lying back in their chairs smoking, from time to time signified their approval.

"You will recollect, Don Antonio, that this gallant general, by the terms of his surrender to General Liniers, understood that he and his soldiers would be granted the honours of war, and naturally expected that he and his men would be allowed to leave the country unmolested. You will also remember that the Spanish authorities, who then returned to office, declared that General Liniers had no power to grant such terms, and disregarded his pledge. Consequently they sent the soldiers, as prisoners, to various places up the country, and most of them are there still, in

spite of General Liniers having promised to General Whitelock to set them free. General Beresford here and several of his higher officers have been held as prisoners ever since the first expulsion of the English, and have for the past six months been confined to the miserable village of Lujan. To a man of activity, bred in camps, like our gallant friend, a life like this was a purgatory, and naturally he was most anxious to escape from it. But how? Help came from an unexpected quarter. There is a mysterious confraternity whose members are to be found in every quarter of the world, in spite of all opposition from Church and State—I mean the Freemasons. While the English occupied Buenos Ayres they held there a Lodge—the first probably ever opened on South American soil—and, to their great surprise, they found amongst the natives some ‘brothers of the mystic band’. My friend here, Señor Lima, and myself were of these. General Beresford was the Master of the Lodge. We are bound by our oath to help all brethren in distress. And so when we heard, a few days ago, that the Government had decided to submit our Brother Beresford to a yet more rigorous confinement by sending him to Catamarca, far into the interior, we thought it was time to act. The order was given to Captain Olivarria to remove the general and his fellow-prisoners to the place I have mentioned. But our friend and brother, Don Saturnio Peña, who is brother-in-law to Captain Olivarria, managed to secure the Government order, by a stratagem which I need not disclose, and, leaving the captain asleep at his house, he summoned us, and together we galloped to Lujan. Success crowned our plans. The jailer handed over the prisoners, and they are all now off in various parties, finding their way, we hope, out of the country. We two undertook to escort the general and his friend. We have had a long day’s ride, as you can see, coming from Lujan to this point, for we have taken a circuit to evade pursuit, and there was little to be had to eat. Knowing your liberal ideas, Don

Antonio, and your sympathy with the English, which you have never tried to conceal, we ventured to cast ourselves on your hospitality, and, as we anticipated, you have not failed us."

The effect of this recital upon Don Antonio was greater than would have been expected. He appeared strangely agitated. Presently he spoke with much emotion. "I may now tell you, my friends, that which I have never before revealed to anyone in this country, knowing the prejudices which exist against secret societies. When I was a young man on my European travels, I too was initiated into the mysteries of Freemasonry. So therefore upon me rests also the obligation of helping my brethren, whatever nationality they may be, who appeal to my aid. To-morrow I shall place you under the guidance of my mayordomo, who, as he is one of my cleverest of trackers, is also one of the most cunning in the art of hiding tracks from pursuers."

"This is indeed fortunate!" exclaimed all the party in a breath.

General Beresford proved to be a most interesting and entertaining companion; how could it be otherwise in a man who, from his boyhood, had led an uninterrupted career of military adventure, and had risen from the rank of a subaltern to that of general by pure merit? Many were the tales he told of his experiences, to which his audience listened spell-bound, until at last Don Antonio insisted that he must take rest before the arduous journey of next day.

Early in the morning the party set out under the capable guidance of Don Cayetano, and Don Antonio and Stephen saw them no more. But two days later, when Don Cayetano returned, they had the satisfaction of hearing that the general and his friend had been safely shipped off to the care of some reliable friends in Monte Video, who would manage to get them a passage to England.

It may interest readers to learn that General Beresford had subsequently a most brilliant career. He took possession of the island of Madeira on behalf of England, and, later, took an active part in the famous retreat upon Corunna of Sir John Moore's expedition. In the Peninsular War he also took an active part. He was finally British Minister in Brazil, and raised to the peerage as Viscount Beresford. The English Government conferred a pension of £300 a year for life upon Señors Padilla, Lima, and Peña, his gallant rescuers.

CHAPTER XXVI

A TRIP TO PATAGONIA

FOR nearly three years Stephen continued to live at the estancia El Porvenir. Don Antonio having soon discovered the young man's industry and ability, and desirous of being relieved himself from administrative work, gradually confided to Stephen the general management of the estate, giving him in return a substantial interest in the income.

The business of land-owners had greatly improved since the first advent of the English at the River Plate. Spain being no longer able to maintain the monopoly of trade with her colonies, many foreigners entered the market, and the prices of produce rapidly rose.

The increase of live stock on an estancia averaged then between 30 and 40 per cent per annum, so that an estanciero could sell about a fourth of his animals every year and still see his herds increase. Stephen saw that as things were going he would soon become comparatively rich, and he frequently congratulated himself on his good luck.

His only trouble was that he could have no tidings of

his mother. He had written to her frequently, but had no reply. This, he hoped, was only caused by the very defective postal service existing at the time between England and South America; but nevertheless it was a great trial.

The two sailors seemed to be perfectly contented with their new mode of life. The flock of sheep had thriven amazingly, and as Don Antonio had given the men an interest in the increase, they too had reason to congratulate themselves on their prospects. Don Antonio also employed them to attend to the cultivation of a vegetable garden which he had been able to plant with seeds brought out by an English captain.

It was a tranquil life which they led at El Porvenir. The charming society of Don Antonio and his daughter rendered enjoyable a time which to one of Stephen's temperament might otherwise have been unbearably monotonous. Nevertheless he sometimes felt oppressed by the effect of the unvarying view of level green plain and blue sky. "How can people born in such a country, and never having seen anything else," he said, when talking with Don Antonio one day, "ever have lofty and poetic feelings? They can form no idea of the emotions caused by the sight of mountain crag and stream, with the varying lights playing over them. The children of this country can only learn from pictures what is the appearance of a hill, a tree, or a waterfall; the beauties arising from frost and the white mantle of snow must ever be unknown to them."

"Much of what you have said, I must admit to be true," replied Don Antonio, "nevertheless we have our poets, many of them quite uneducated men, who, like the minstrels of mediæval Europe, wander through the country recounting events in verse and song, and are everywhere welcomed. There is, after all, some field for a poetic soul in contemplating the very vastness of the view, bounded only by the horizon, and in speculating upon what is beyond. Is it the

end of the world, the wilderness, danger, death? Then how magnificent the effect of the thunderstorms so frequent at night on these plains—one moment the whole scene lit up by a blaze of brilliance, the next, all black obscurity! Who can tell where the lightning will next strike? There is poetry, too, in the bird-like freedom of the wandering gaucho's life. Believe me, that there is no country without some peculiar attractions and compensations."

In spite, however, of all that Don Antonio could say with regard to the poetry of the pampas, Stephen at times felt an almost uncontrollable longing for a change. Though his duties gave him plenty of occupation, this life on an estancia, in which months would sometimes pass in uneventful routine, was very different from the adventurous career he had anticipated when he landed in South America.

It was therefore with delight that he seized upon an opportunity for a break from the routine, the idea of which arose in a conversation which he had with his "patron" one day when the latter had just returned from a visit to Buenos Ayres. Don Antonio had been telling him how he had met there the captain of a schooner who had just come back from the Rio Negro in Patagonia, with a cargo of salt, and of the wonderful stories he had told him about that country. There was a regular trade, he said, in which many such small vessels were employed, taking down goods for the supply of the Indians, which they bartered for skins and ostrich feathers, and also for salt, carted in from the salt lakes at Salinas de las Piedras, a few miles to the north of the river. Sometimes the ships had to wait a few weeks for their cargoes to be collected, and then the captain had an opportunity of going up the country amongst the friendly Indians and joining with them in their hunts. "By all accounts," said Don Antonio, "Patagonia is a very different sort of place from this, and the Indians there appear to be a much superior race to those we encounter on our pampas. The captain tells me that

the men average considerably over six feet in height, and that they are finely proportioned, and, dressed as they are in flowing robes of skin, they look quite majestic. It was the discovery of some tracks of footprints of gigantic size by the explorer Magallanes and his men, as you may have heard," continued Don Antonio, "which led to their giving the country its name Patagonia, that is, 'the land of big feet'. Afterwards they saw that the great size of the impressions was caused by the custom of these aborigines of swathing their feet in skins to resist the cold of their rigorous climate. The style of dress adopted by the natives appeared to add to their stature, and when the Spaniards first met them they formed an exaggerated idea in this respect, so that the first report they brought was that they stood between seven and eight feet high. However, though they are now known not to be quite so tall, they are a splendid race physically.

"The captain told me some very extraordinary tales with regard to his adventures in hunting the ostrich, the puma, and the guanaco."

"What kind of an animal is that?" asked Stephen.

"It is a curious-looking creature, peculiar to South America," replied Don Antonio, "a variety of the llama, which, as you know, was the only beast of burden known to the aborigines of Peru prior to the arrival of the Spaniards; but the guanaco has always been a wild animal, bigger and of a redder colour than the llama. Someone has pithily described it as having 'the neck of a camel, feet of a deer, wool of a sheep, neigh of a horse, and the swiftness of the fiend'. Hunting them is grand sport, as you will readily believe."

Coming just when Stephen was in the frame of mind described above, this conversation had a very exciting effect upon him, and he eagerly asked Don Antonio whether it would not be possible to accompany the captain on his return voyage.

Don Antonio, with his usual good-nature, acceded sympathetically to Stephen's desires, and immediately wrote to his friend the captain on the subject. In a few days it was all arranged, and Stephen joyously set out for Buenos Ayres for this longed-for holiday.

A voyage of eight days, with somewhat rough weather, but otherwise uneventful, brought the schooner to the mouth of the Rio Negro. The appearance of the land was most uninviting. To the south was a long line of cliffs, perpendicular, but of no great height; the north bank was so low that it did not come into view for some time after the other was sighted. Eighteen miles up the river is situated the settlement of Carmen de Patagones, which they found to be a miserable group of straw "ranchos", scarcely worthy of the name of a village. This settlement had been founded about twenty-five years previously, and its sole object was to provide accommodation for the people engaged in collecting salt from the brine lakes. The country around, as far as the eye could see, was nothing but an undulating pebbly desert, with not a trace of vegetation, except here and there some isolated clumps of scrub. Monotonous as Stephen had found the pampas, they now appeared like a paradise compared to this.

There were several schooners at anchor in the river when they arrived in front of the village, and the captain told Stephen that evidently they would have to wait some weeks for their cargo, so deficient were the people in appliances for collecting and loading the salt.

Next day Stephen, having borrowed a horse, went for a trip to inspect these wonderful lakes, which lie about fifteen miles from the town.

They are a series of shallow pools of considerable area, some of them as much as four miles in length by two or three miles in breadth, the bottoms of which are composed of pure salt, varying in thickness from a few inches to several feet. In summer, when the gathering takes place,

they are quite dried up, and the bed looks as if covered with glistening snow, presenting a wonderful contrast to the brown and desolate plain which surrounds them.

A pleasing variation in the colouring was, however, given by the beautiful crimson and black plumage of numerous groups of flamingoes which frequented the mud-banks on the margins of the lake.

In the centre of the lake beds many men were at work digging out the salt, and numerous bullock-carts were bringing it to the margin, where it was piled up in great heaps. It was thirsty work this under the burning sun, but not a drop of water was to be had except that brought in barrels from the town. Stephen wondered that people could be found to adopt such a mode of life when so much pleasanter a living could be easily earned tending cattle on the plains.

It was for sport, however, more than for exploration that Stephen had come to Patagonia, and he was anxious to begin. So the very next day he took his gun, and, accompanied by a native of the place, sallied forth in search of the famous guanaco, herds of which he was told he would find at no great distance from the town. He felt almost incredulous as to this, however, as he rode over the first few miles. Everywhere was the same scenery, only shingly plains and sparse scrub, not a drop of water to be seen. How could large animals like guanacos ever find subsistence upon such arid land? His reflections were suddenly interrupted by a cry from his companion. "Look, señor, there they are!"

Following the direction in which his guide was pointing, Stephen quickly discerned a flock of large animals browsing upon the scrub some hundreds of yards off. They were considerably bigger than deer, of a light-fawn colour on the back, with gray ears and white bellies, but quite different in appearance from any animal he had ever seen before, being remarkable for their long necks and the erect manner in which they carried their heads.

Apparently the animals took no notice of them as they approached, and Stephen was almost disappointed to see that they would probably be too easy a quarry and give but little excitement to a hunter.

Just, however, as he and his companion had got within so short a distance of the herd that Stephen thought he might almost try a shot, and unslung his gun to make ready, the nearest animal uttered a sharp cry, quite like the neigh of a horse, and off the whole pack scampered at a lumbering gallop, apparently slowly, but in reality at a very swift pace, as they soon found out, for they were rapidly left behind, though following at the top-speed of their horses. Stephen was profoundly disappointed at the failure of his first attempt.

"Never mind," said the guide, "there are plenty about here; we shall soon come across another lot."

Sure enough, when they had ridden about half an hour in another direction they again spied a herd browsing, like the others, on the scrub.

"Now," thought Stephen, "I shall try another plan." So, leaping from his horse and throwing the bridle to his attendant, he began to stalk the game in the approved manner he had heard was used by sportsmen after deer. Again he had got almost within gunshot of the herd when the sharp neigh was heard, and off they scampered like the wind. "How tiresome!" cried Stephen to his guide, who had by this time rejoined him. "At this rate we shall never get on at all."

"Señor," said his companion deferentially, "I see that you are a new hand at this game. Will you permit me. I will show you how it is managed." And as they came in sight of another flock he dismounted, took the gun from Stephen, and gave the horses into his keeping.

Now came a curious episode. The guide advanced towards the game, but instead of taking cover or crawling as Stephen had done, he began dancing about as he

approached them, waving his poncho, and finally lay down on his back and began kicking his legs into the air, all the time singing some country song in a rude voice, which seemed little more than discordant shouting.

To Stephen's surprise, the guanacos, instead of scampering away as before, pricked up their ears and all began looking keenly at the man. Apparently they could not make out what this extraordinary object was, and gradually, their curiosity overmastering fear, they crept nearer and nearer, to find out what it could be, until they were almost within twenty yards of the prostrate man, who kept on kicking his legs about more rapidly than ever. Then like a flash the guide sprang to his feet and fired both barrels into the herd, bringing down two fine animals. "That is how we get them," he cried triumphantly.

Stephen was not slow to follow his guide's methods, so that in the course of the day he managed to shoot far more game than he could possibly carry home. The guanaco, he found, now that he had time to examine them, were heavy beasts, about five or six feet in length, and standing about four feet high at the shoulder, bearing a curious resemblance to a camel, but without a hump. The guide told Stephen that their flesh was good to eat, especially the head, which was usually the only part taken by hunters when game was plentiful.

It was curious to see that as soon as a guanaco fell there would sweep down a bevy of carrion-feeding birds, which seemed to come into existence, as if by magic, out of a cloudless sky, where previously not a speck was visible. Generally these were like big crows, "corranchos" the guide called them, or buzzards about the size of a turkey; but sometimes great condors would appear, and then the smaller birds would retire to a respectful distance. These immense vultures are remarkable for their great spread of wing, from eight to ten feet from tip to tip, and for their wonderfully graceful flight, for they never seem to

move a pinion, but skim through the air by merely varying the direction of their body. Round their neck there is a ruff of white downy feathers, and but for their bare scaly heads they would be beautiful creatures.

As they continued their ride over the plains Stephen was surprised to see the amount of animal life which frequented them in spite of their barrenness, and, above all, the complete absence of water. Once they saw a hare in full flight pursued by a gray fox, whilst near a heap of stones were a group of armadillos ambling along with their curious gait.

A number of black birds of prey, apparently hovering over a carcass, attracted their attention, and upon riding up to the spot they found the body of a guanaco on the ground. Dismounting, Stephen discovered that its neck was broken, and from a gash just over the shoulders the blood was still flowing.

“The work of a puma, señor,” said the guide in reply to Stephen’s enquiring look.

This was welcome information, for now, thought Stephen, a chance had come of seeing, and perhaps slaying, the South American lion of which he had often heard. He at once looked for its tracks, which were quite visible, and proposed to go in pursuit.

“No use without dogs,” said the guide laconically; and as night was now drawing nigh they had to ride homewards without delay.

CHAPTER XXVII

AMONGST THE TEHUELCHE INDIANS

FOR several days Stephen pursued this style of hunting, with plenty of success as regarded the shooting of guanacos, though he never had the luck to come across a puma, but he soon became tired of a sport which seemed

a mere wanton destruction of life. When, therefore, the captain of the schooner asked him to join him in an expedition he was about to make for the purpose of trading with some Tehuelche Indians who had encamped in the neighbourhood, he readily agreed. The trading party, consisting of the captain, Stephen, a guide, and several men driving pack-horses laden with the merchandise, started early next morning.

There is something exceedingly exhilarating in the Patagonian air, and in spite of the depressing nature of the surroundings—everywhere the same shingly desert with sparse stunted vegetation—Stephen's spirits rose with a bound as they galloped along at full speed. He felt a complete sense of freedom and an emancipation from all the restraints of civilization.

In such a mood he could not be content to remain merely following in the wake of the party, so he gave his horse free rein and rode about to one side or another in excited, but unavailing pursuit of every herd of guanacos which came in view.

He had rushed off upon one of these playful excursions rather farther than before, and when, as was usual, the herd of guanacos he was making for had scampered off he turned to rejoin the party; to his amazement he found that it had disappeared, as if swallowed up by Mother Earth, and that he was apparently alone in the midst of the boundless plain.

Utterly bewildered, he rapidly continued his ride in the direction from which he fancied he had come, when suddenly his horse snorted and stopped with all four feet planted together, and Stephen was startled to find that he had drawn up upon the brink of a precipice. About a hundred feet below there flowed, over a wide, shingly, and level bottom, a river, even at this season of considerable breadth, but which, according to unmistakable indications, must have been many times as wide when the

water from the melting snows of the far-off Andes came rushing down. The valley was covered with luxurious pasture, and Stephen could see that his companions had halted on it for their mid-day rest to give their horses an opportunity to feed. It seemed to him remarkable that until he was upon the actual edge of the ravine he did not even suspect its existence. A few yards back and the landscape seemed but an uninterrupted plain. This, however, would be the experience of anyone, in similar circumstances, who was unacquainted with the peculiar features of the country.

By cautiously proceeding along the brink Stephen at last came upon the zigzag path down the steep slope by which his companions had descended. By the time he had reached their camp his appetite had sharpened to such a pitch that he was glad to partake of a portion of a guanaco, which he learned one of the men had captured by a cast of the "bolas", and which was now roasting before their fire.

In a couple of hours they were again on the move, crossing the rapid but shallow stream and scrambling up the opposite side of the ravine, arriving once more upon the apparently interminable plain.

For several leagues they pushed on monotonously, Stephen now keeping more closely to the rest, and at last arrived at the brink of another ravine, and saw in the valley below the Indian camp of which they were in search.

There were a large number of tents, pitched at the base of the slope, evidently covered with guanaco skins sewn together, rectangular in form, with sloping roofs, and sides nearly vertical. In front of each a fire was burning, round which several figures were reclining, while on the outskirts of the camp numerous horses were feeding.

The party paused but a few seconds and then began the descent. As they neared the tents they were received by

the discordant yelps and barks of a host of wild-looking dogs of fierce aspect, which were soon, however, driven away by the whips of a group of Indians who advanced to meet the strangers.

Stephen saw that the stories he had heard with regard to the appearance of these aborigines were not altogether fanciful.

The "cacique", or chief, was a fine-looking man, over six feet in stature and of massive build. He was dressed, like all the others, in a *chiripá* made of guanaco skins, worn with the fur side inwards and painted in a symmetrical pattern in red and blue on the outer side. Over his shoulders hung a robe, also of guanaco skins, fur side inwards. His long black hair was bound with a thong round his brow. The colour of these Indians was a light copper hue, but their faces were painted in brown patches with white stripes. Their foreheads were somewhat low, but not receding, their carriage graceful, and their general appearance pleasing.

It was not the first time by many that the guide and the captain had visited these people, and they were received as old friends. They and their party were led to the centre of the camp, and it was intimated to them through the guide, who acted as interpreter, that a special tent and fire had been put at their disposal. Their visit had not been unexpected, and plenty of ostrich meat was roasting in front of the fire for their supper, giving forth appetizing odours. The visitors were only too glad to fall to at once, nor would the meal have been despicable had they been less hungry, for the ostrich flesh tasted like turkey; while as a second course they had the gizzards cooked Indian fashion by filling them with hot stones; and finally, as dessert, ostrich eggs roasted in the embers were presented, making altogether a very luxurious repast, though served in the midst of a desert.

While partaking of their supper they were surrounded

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by Indians who watched them curiously, and who were not less curiously watched by Stephen, as this was his first experience amongst the aborigines of South America. He noticed that the men were all exceedingly well proportioned and remarkable for the great development of their arms and shoulders. Their legs were rather short and thick, and frequently bowed, which he concluded was on account of their spending most of their lives on horse-back.

The dress of the women consisted of a long tunic of calico generally adorned with beads at the neck, and they wore belts embroidered with beads and coloured threads; over all was thrown a guanaco robe or "capa" like those worn by the men. Some of the younger women were quite pretty, but the old ones looked hideous. These people were not at all stolid and silent in their behaviour, as Stephen had been led to believe was usual amongst Indians; but, on the contrary, they kept up a constant chatter, and frequently broke into ripples of laughter, which Stephen fancied, from the glances which were exchanged amongst them, arose from remarks which were being made upon the appearance of the visitors.

Presently, as the party lay back resting and smoking, the surrounding Indians approached them with outstretched hands, and the strangers had no difficulty in understanding that they were begging. The object of the men's request was tobacco, and of the women's sugar; and the guide, knowing their ways, had brought a sufficient supply to give as presents and put them in a good humour. Their wants being satisfied, their hosts now clustered round, eagerly asking them questions like inquisitive children. Most of these, being in their own language, could only be understood by the aid of the interpreter, but some spoke a little Spanish. One of these, a fine, tall young fellow, took his seat close to Stephen, and after looking at him for a minute, said in Spanish:

“Are you not English?”

“Yes,” replied Stephen, also in Spanish, wondering where a Patagonian Indian could have heard of his nation, when at once his interlocutor exclaimed in English:

“Hullo, shipmate! Won’t you give me a plug of tobacco?”

“What! you speak English!” cried Stephen, profoundly surprised at hearing his mother tongue in so unexpected a quarter.

“What! you speak English!” retorted the Tehuelche.

“Of course I speak English,” replied Stephen; “but where did you learn?”

“Of course I speak English,” repeated the Indian, whereupon the whole of the company burst into a roar of laughter upon observing the air of bewildered amazement depicted on Stephen’s face.

The guide now explained that these people have a wonderful faculty of imitating any sounds they hear, for the most part parrot-like, without understanding the meaning. By interrogating this particular Indian, however, he found that when a boy he had once been on board an English vessel for a few weeks in the Straits of Magellan, but the words he had uttered formed almost his whole stock in that language, and had been fixed in his memory by the circumstance that they had generally brought him what he most wanted, tobacco; the other phrases had been merely his repetition of Stephen’s own words.

This circumstance gave rise to a great deal of amusement during the evening, as others of the party would speak to the Indians in Spanish and even in French, with which the captain had some acquaintance, and in each instance the words would be repeated by some Indian just like an echo. But the strangers were quite unable to pronounce the numerous phrases addressed to them in return by the Tehuelches, and their futile attempts caused much merriment.

At last, however, all were so fatigued that they decided to retire for the night. They found on the floor of the tent assigned to them an ample supply of guanaco robes for bedding and coverlets. Following the example of his companions, Stephen made a comfortable mattress and pillow from his saddle and was soon fast asleep.

Next morning they were awakened at dawn by the sound of joyous cries and laughter, and upon going to the door of their tent they saw the whole of the Indians disporting themselves in the river, although the air had a sharp, frosty feeling which would have made less hardy folk shrink from such a cold bath. The guide explained that the Patagonians are remarkable for their cleanly habits, and always bathe at least once a day when they can manage it.

The whole of the day was occupied in trading, the Indians bartering bunches of ostrich feathers, ostrich and guanaco robes, lassoes and bridles beautifully plaited from the sinews of the guanaco or ostrich, against the knives, tobacco, sugar, maté, and other articles brought by the visitors. After a while Stephen became tired of watching the transactions, in which he had no interest, and wandered through the camp to observe the manners and customs of the Indians. He found the women busily at work, some with their domestic employments of cooking or cleaning out the tents, others dressing ostrich and guanaco skins, or sewing them together to form robes. He was surprised to see how neatly this was done, especially as their needles were only pointed bone, and their thread but sinews. The colouring of the skin side of the robes and the drawing of the patterns on them were being done by another group, with only natural earths and fat as paint. What men there were about, not engaged in trading, were squatting, lazily smoking, or, if doing anything, leisurely knocking stones from the river against each other to round them sufficiently to serve as "bolas". The little boys showed more activity, being busily employed in practising the throwing of

miniature lassoes and "bolas" at the numerous dogs which prowled about.

While engaged in watching the cleverness of the little fellows, Stephen was accosted by a man, dressed like the gauchos of the pampas, whom he had not noticed the night before. He soon learned that the man was a native of Buenos Ayres, and a deserter from a regiment of the Spanish army stationed on the Indian frontier. He had not dared to make his appearance until he learned that there were no Spanish officials amongst the visitors. His name, he said, was Eleutorio Gomez. Since leaving the army he had been leading a wandering life on the plains as an ostrich-hunter, and he had gradually worked his way to this remote southern point, his safety lying, he considered, in keeping as far as possible from the Spanish settlements.

From Gomez, Stephen learned much about the territory and the various tribes of Indians who lived on it. They could hardly be said to dwell there, for they were continually wandering about, being obliged to follow the game. "No doubt," said Gomez, "you, like the Spaniards who have come to Patagonia, and who never get far from the coast, have formed an idea that the country is nothing but a stony desert; but I can tell you that you are greatly mistaken. Away back over there," pointing to the west as he spoke, "at the foot of the Andes, it is really a paradise, a land covered with luxuriant pasture and abounding with lovely lakes. How else could you account for the vast quantities of game you meet? How could they breed and subsist if it were not that the animals were always within easy range of food and water? But the Indians take good care not to tell the Spaniards of this splendid country, as they know very well that if the white men heard of it they would soon drive them away.

"I often wonder," continued Gomez, who appeared to be an observant and intelligent man, "what sort of a place this must have been in the old days, for almost everywhere

one comes upon skeletons of what must have been gigantic beasts, thigh-bones three or four inches thick, and skulls about a yard long, some with great teeth still stuck in them. The Indian traditions speak of them as 'tree-eaters', but there are no large trees to be seen now."

Gomez went on to tell Stephen of a curious place he had come across in his wanderings, a little plain almost completely covered with the dried-up skeletons of guanacos, and said that the Indians assured him that it was the "panteon" or cemetery of these animals, and that whenever a guanaco felt himself to be nearing his end he would travel for leagues in order to die there; and it looked as if they were correct in their explanations.

Stephen eagerly asked him about the puma, the so-called "lion" of South America.

"Bah!" said Gomez, "he is a cur, an utter coward in spite of his fierce appearance; no Indian fears him a jot, as you will soon see for yourself, for I hear that there is going to be a great hunt to-morrow, and it is almost certain we shall come across some of these beasts."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HUNT WITH THE INDIANS

STEPHEN could hardly sleep that night, so greatly was he excited by the news of the coming hunt. At length he was to witness a scene such as he, like almost every boy, had dreamt of, the pursuit of game in native Indian fashion. He had just dozed off at last when the summons came for the party to get ready to start. The sun was not yet up, but the guide told them that they would have a long way to travel before reaching the place where the hunt was to be, so that it was necessary to start early.

The camp was now a scene of bustle, the activity of the male Indians contrasting strongly with the indolence they had displayed on the previous day. Soon all the hunting-party was mounted, had forded the river, and was scrambling up the opposite bank of the ravine. Upon reaching the table-land, Stephen found it to be identical in character with that which he had traversed with his party on their way to the Indian camp two days before, but as they galloped on at a rapid pace its nature began to change, and soon clumps of pampa-grass appeared here and there, gradually growing closer together as they advanced; and when they had covered a few leagues the country had become almost attractive in appearance, and quite fitted, Stephen thought, to support a few rough cattle.

At length they came upon a small, shallow lake, which had evidently been their goal, for here the Indians drew rein and dismounted without waiting for orders. The mid-day meal was then taken, consisting of roasted and sun-dried meat brought in the saddle-bags. After about an hour's halt, Stephen observed that the chief gave a signal, whereupon small parties of men mounted and rode off to the right and left.

In a few minutes other groups started off, also in each direction, and this went on until about two-thirds of the party had ridden away. Stephen now began to understand their manoeuvres. The riders had gone in order to form a large circle, embracing an area of the plain some leagues in extent. Presently those left at the base began to open out their ranks and deployed in a long line. In this order they stood still, evidently waiting for instructions. How the chief had seen the signal from the outposts who formed the other side of the ring Stephen could not tell, but he knew the Indians to be remarkable for their keen sight, and it was obvious that the leader had observed something, for he gave the order to advance. At once the whole line was off at full gallop, and in a very short time Stephen could

perceive, away off in the distance, herds of guanaco and ostriches rushing hither and thither in alarm. Gradually, as the circle closed, the outside riders came into view, and flying before them were the herds of frightened game, rapidly concentrating into a panic-stricken crowd. At a signal from the leader every man began swinging the "bolas", of which each carried several sets at his saddle-bow, and with a yell rushed towards the game. Soon as many animals were lying struggling on the ground as there were sets of bolas to throw, for the Indians appeared never to make a miss, and entangled with certainty the legs of the flying ostrich or guanaco as they rushed past. The remainder of the herds rapidly fled out of sight.

Then the Indians jumped off their horses, which are trained to stand where left, and set to work killing the animals by cutting their throats as they lay, and in an incredibly short time they had them skinned and cut up, the old and lean beasts and birds being left to the vultures which swooped down in black clouds from all quarters.

Stephen's attention was just then attracted to a pack of dogs which were barking furiously, apparently at something concealed in a clump of bushes. "Ah!" thought he, "it may be a puma, as Gomez said last night." Sure enough, when he approached the spot he was able to distinguish the form of an animal. It looked like a large heavily-built mastiff, with a head resembling that of a lioness. In colour it was a tawny yellow. Its eyes were glaring with demoniacal fury, and at times it rose up and clawed the air with formidable paws, spitting and yelling like a huge cat.

But for the character which Gomez had given it, Stephen would have expected it at any moment to spring upon its canine tormentors and tear them to pieces, or even upon some of the horsemen who were now rapidly coming up to the spot. Amongst the first of those was the ostrich-hunter, and Stephen was surprised to see that he did not even take the trouble to throw the bolas, but, coolly riding up to

within a few feet of the apparently infuriated beast, he brought down one of the heavy balls upon its head, without even letting go the thong, and dashed out its brains. Immediately he jumped from his horse, and having driven off the dogs with his heavy "revenque" (riding-whip), he set to work to skin it and cut it up. The flesh, he said, being very fat, was much prized as a change from the lean ostrich and guanaco meat.

As it was too late to return to the camp that night, the Indians began making preparations to bivouac on the plain near the lake. Fires of brushwood were soon blazing, in front of which plenty of meat was roasting, and the supper eaten by the hunters was a perfectly glutinous feast, such as is enjoyed by people who have frequently to undergo periods of famine.

It was the first night which Stephen had ever spent under the open sky, but the fatigues of the day and the freshness of the air soon sent him off into a sound sleep. Towards morning, however, his slumbers were disturbed by dreams, which gradually took the form of a nightmare, a feeling as of a heavy weight pressing on his chest. At last he awoke with a struggle, and it took him some little time to realize that during the night snow had fallen to such an extent as to cover him with a layer of about three inches thick. The sun was just rising, and he saw that the snow-storm had ceased. His companions seemed to have disappeared, and only a few white mounds indicated their presence. In a few minutes they rose up like ghosts, shaking the snow from their flowing robes.

Over the glittering plain the hunting-party rode back to the camp, where their safe arrival with ample provisions was welcomed by the women with joyous cries.

CHAPTER XXIX

EXIT THE POWER OF SPAIN

ONE result of Stephen's trip was to make him more contented with his life on the estancia. When he contrasted the smiling verdure of the pampas, flat as they were, with the arid deserts of Patagonia, and its rigorous climate with that which they enjoyed in the settlements of La Plata, he felt that life at El Porvenir had many charms after all.

Now that his hunting instinct had been aroused, Stephen found that there was plenty of scope for it even upon the pampas. Wherever there was a water-course or lagoon—and Don Cayetano guided him to many of them—there were abundance of wild duck and other fowl, and even storks and flamingoes, which provided ample sport. Upon the plains themselves there were always numerous coveys of partridges and the horned plover, styled by the natives “tiro-tiro” from its cry. Of animals there were the biscachos, which looked like a cross between the hare and the rabbit. They honeycombed the plain with their burrows in every direction, to the danger of horsemen, as the feet of the horses frequently broke through this crust of excavated soil, causing them to stumble and throw their riders. These animals are, however, scarcely worth powder and shot, both their skins and their flesh being useless, and they are only chased as vermin. However, these little sporting excursions helped to break the monotony of their life, and Stephen and his friends had every reason to be contented.

From time to time news reached them with regard to the progress of events in the country. The invasion of Buenos Ayres by the English seemed to have had the effect of awakening the spirit of the people and of teaching them their capabilities. As the impotence of Spain became daily

more evident, so in proportion the desire of the colonists to cast off her yoke was strengthened. But the malcontents were not unanimous with regard to the course to be adopted. They were divided into two great parties—one in favour of only securing local autonomy without severing their allegiance to the Spanish Crown; the other, styled “the American”, would be satisfied with nothing but complete independence. The most prominent man in the first party was General Liniers, who had shown such ability and zeal in repelling the English. With him were associated the old Spanish families. On the other side were ranged all those of colonial birth, in number much stronger, but in influence greatly weaker, for no colonist, under the Spanish régime, was ever appointed to an office of authority in the civil government.

It was not altogether the same in military service. Many of the officers, and even some of the commanders of the troops, were natives, and the rank and file was largely recruited from the Creole population, which at that time actually outnumbered the old Spaniards in the ratio of about twenty to one.

As disaffection spread, the “American” party quickly realized how helpless were their former rulers. They resolved that the existing position of affairs should not continue, and took their measures accordingly. On the morning of the 25th May, 1810—a memorable date in South American history,—Colonel Cornelio Saavedra, commander of the best regiment in Buenos Ayres, waited upon his excellency, Don Hidalgo Cisneros, the Spanish Viceroy, and civilly informed him that the authority of Spain was at an end. As all the military commanders had already been won over by Colonel Saavedra and had agreed to act with him, the viceroy had no option but to surrender as gracefully as he could. He was made to sign a paper transferring his authority to a junta, or committee of citizens, and the act appeared complete.

Soon afterwards the fallen viceroy and his staff were despatched in a small vessel to the Canary Islands on their way to Spain.

The change of dynasty was not, however, accomplished without bloodshed. The gallant General Liniers (who, though a Frenchman, felt bound in honour to support the cause of the government whose service he had entered) raised a small body of troops, sympathizers with Spain, at Cordoba, a city in the interior, to which he had repaired.

With these he marched towards Buenos Ayres, but was met by the colonial forces, completely defeated, and taken prisoner. Within a few hours he and his principal officers were tried by court-martial, condemned as rebels, and shot upon the field. Much regret was felt throughout the country at this sad ending of a brave and noble man.

It soon appeared, as Señor Rodriguez had foreseen, that the colonists were unable to make a proper use of their newly-acquired freedom. Utterly inexperienced in the art of government, they spent many months in debating the form of administration under which the country should now be placed—whether a Unitarian republic, with all authority centred in one congress and executive, with delegates in the provinces; or a Federation, with each state autonomous, and sending representatives to the national government.

Upon these questions, and others of a more theoretical nature, the whole attention of the new rulers was concentrated, to the neglect of others of more immediate practical importance.¹

Few, however, but the people of Buenos Ayres took any interest in such subjects. As Don Antonio had predicted, the country people were entirely absorbed in their own immediate concerns, and too ignorant to understand the

¹ It seems almost incredible that the final settlement of the constitution of the republic in its present condition as a confederation was not accomplished for more than forty years later, and that it was this question which gave rise to most of the civil wars and anarchy which devastated the country.

process of building up a new nation. Freed from the visits of the Spanish tax-gatherer, they now appeared to believe that they could henceforth live without paying any contributions to the Government, and strongly resisted any attempt to collect such levies. They threw all the blame for their demand upon the people of the towns, against whom arose an almost universal odium in the country. Some of the *caudillos*, or country chiefs, did not even go so far as to reason upon governmental questions at all, but simply saw in the new state of affairs an opportunity to indulge their predatory instincts. With their own people, and bands of outlaws who soon joined them, they roamed the country in search of plunder. The principal booty which excited their covetousness was cattle and horses, especially the latter, for, as it was customary in such bands for every man to have at least three horses, to ensure mobility by remounts, the demand for these animals became enormous.

After a time these robbers grew to be so audacious as to raid estates in broad daylight and to attack any owners who ventured to defend their property. It was after several visits from such bandits to his estancia that Don Antonio announced to Stephen that he had resolved to leave El Porvenir and reside at his estate in Paraguay, where he believed he and his daughter would be safe, for a time at least, from the dangers which now menaced the inhabitants of the other provinces.

"I have before told you," said he to Stephen, "that the country is an Eden, and that the people are of a gentler race than those down here. You, my friend, and your two countrymen, are of course at liberty to remain here to look after your interests, but for the sake of Pepita I must leave all mine to take their chance and go."

Stephen did not hesitate to assure him that he too would go to Paraguay.

The thought of being separated from Pepita, whom he

had come to love more day by day, though he had never dared to utter a declaration of his feelings, was unbearable, whilst the prospect of travelling in a new country was to one of his temperament far more attractive than that of stagnating on the everlasting plains, even though he knew that his means were thereby being increased.

As for the two sailors, they were not the sort of men to let mere accumulation of property stand in the way of change and adventure. Their desertion from the ship and abandonment of their profits had already proved that.

CHAPTER XXX

ON THE ROAD TO PARAGUAY

THREE were two modes of travelling then in vogue in those countries for such long journeys as that now contemplated by Don Antonio and his party. One was to keep to the main roads, along which post-houses were established at regular intervals, where fresh horses could always be obtained; the other was for the party to take with them a *tropilla*, or troop of horses, for remounts when those which they rode became tired.

Señor Rodriguez chose the latter, the usual one adopted by people of his class, as it left them free to take any route they chose. He owned plenty of horses, some of which had been specially trained to run in *tropillas*.

These little troops are always led by a mare, which carries a bell hung from her neck, and the horses, if well trained, will never leave her side. It is a beautiful sight to watch the horses and their leader. They vie with each other in getting near enough to fondle her, placing their necks over her back. When a halt has to be made, all that has to be done is to manacle the mare, so that she can

just hobble along to feed. The horses will never stray far.

The horse gear used for such long journeys would appear to Europeans somewhat cumbrous, but experience has taught travellers in those countries its advantages and almost indispensability. The bridles were of plaited raw hide, with enormously strong bits. On the back of the horse was first placed as a foundation a large sheep-skin, semi-tanned and with the wool removed. Over this was put a woollen blanket or rug folded, which was covered with a piece of untanned hide to keep off the rain. Next came what may be termed the real saddle, from which the heavy wooden stirrups were suspended. It was formed of wood and strong leather. The whole of this furniture was secured to the horse by a broad girth of raw hide, fastened by another strip of hide running through rings on the girth and saddle, which could be laced up to any tension required. Over the saddle was put a sheep-skin with the wool on, then a piece of soft leather for the rider's seat, and the whole was again secured by a surcingle of woven wool, bound by a thong like the other. From such a saddle a comfortable bed and pillow can be made at night, most useful in camping-out. To complete the outfit there were two saddle-bags behind to carry clothes and provisions, while the lasso was coiled under the saddle-bow on the right side and secured to the girth. The gauchos, two of whom accompanied the party, also carried sets of bolas.

"And so we're off to Paraguay!" said Mick. "How far away might that place be, Mr. Herrick?"

"About thirteen hundred miles," replied Stephen.

"Sure, that's a long distance. Whenever will we get there?"

"Mick," said Sandy, "ye mind me of an old woman—one from your own country—that once was going to America in a ship I was in. She was always asking when

we would get there. So one day the mate says, after she had been pestering him with questions that no man could answer: 'D'ye see that line yonder ahead, Mrs. O'Flaherty?' pointing to the horizon. 'Yes,' says she. 'Well,' said the mate, 'when we get up to yon line we'll be in Ameriky.' That puzzled her sore for days, and we all had some fun seeing her watching the horizon, while she sometimes muttered: 'Och, the decaving man; it gets no nearer.' So," continued Sandy, pointing to the horizon on the plain, "when we get up to that line we'll be in Paraguay."

It was a lovely morning when they set out. They went at a rapid pace for miles, but so little was there to indicate their progress that Mick declared it "just to be like horizon-hunting."

Don Antonio had decided not to pass through Buenos Ayres, but to cut across the country outside it. Cayetano acted as their guide until they struck the northern road.

After a long day's ride they reached Lujan, the miserable village where General Beresford had been kept a prisoner. It consisted of only a few mud-built huts, but had a wonderfully fine church for such a place, built in honour of a celebrated image of the Virgin, which had once indicated by miraculous signs, when on a journey from Chili to Buenos Ayres, its determination not to be taken beyond that spot.

For accommodation at night, all that the party had to do was to ride up to the nearest estancia house and intimate their desire to stay there. Everywhere they were welcomed with the utmost hospitality, and no charge was made for their entertainment. To have offered payment to the hosts would have been regarded by them as an insult.

At Lujan they joined the main road, or rather the track leading from Buenos Ayres to the interior. From the earliest settlement days this was the principal route used by the Spaniards, after they had possessed themselves of

the River Plate, to their distant colonies in Peru and Paraguay, in preference to navigation by sea or river. Thus the country along it soon became much more populated than did the vast plains in the south.

As the party proceeded, Stephen observed that the land was much more undulating than the pampas they had started from, though there was nothing in sight worthy of being denominated a hill. Here and there they came upon patches of land which had been cultivated, and were now covered with crops of maize, and occasionally they would see luxuriant meadows of *alfalfa* (vetches), on which cattle were being fattened. The most novel feature, however, was the enormous thickets of thistles, growing from three to twelve feet high, through which the path was sometimes so narrow that but one horse could pass at a time. The riders suffered severely from the strong sharp spines, which penetrated their clothing like needles, until they obtained some sheep-skins, with the wool on, with which to cover their legs.

Don Antonio told Stephen that however great a nuisance these thickets of thistles might appear, they were also of great use, for in times of drought cattle could find subsistence from them for weeks, when not a blade of grass was to be had on the plains.

They met or passed numerous trains of wagons, carrying goods up the country or bringing down produce—great carts carrying about a ton and a half, drawn by six yokes of oxen and driven by men on horseback. Sometimes these trains, Don Antonio said, took as long as twelve months on a round trip to the far inland provinces. Sometimes also they met long troops of mules laden with bars of silver bullion from the mines in Peru. "It is remarkable," said Don Antonio, "that these treasure transports are rarely, if ever molested, nor an ingot lost, though each bar of silver represents a fortune to the scantily-paid muleteers."

Two more days' riding at a fairly rapid pace, and they reached the village of Rosario de Santa Fé. They had passed the villages of Carmen del Areco and Arricife, and the towns, if so they might be called, of San Pedro and San Nicolas de los Aroyos. They had forded rivers and rested for a siesta for some hours each day, but nevertheless covered about sixty miles of their way. The post-houses Stephen found to be miserable mud huts, and he was glad they were independent of their accommodation.

Rosario at that time was a wretched-looking place with only about a thousand inhabitants, living in mud-built houses. It stood on a high precipitous bank overlooking the River Paraná, which was a noble-looking stream. Don Antonio told Stephen, as they looked across it, that it was over two miles broad at this point, and averaged more than ten feet in depth. "When you remember," he said, "that the place where we now stand is about two thousand miles from the source of the river, and two hundred miles above its mouth, it gives some idea of the immensity of this channel. For hundreds of miles above and below us there is not a cataract to obstruct navigation, and it is easy to predict that some day this little town will become a vast commercial emporium, for from it branch off the roads to all the principal places in the interior."

Their halting-place at noon next day was at the Franciscan monastery of San Lorenzo, where they were received with the usual hospitality. By the rules of the order, however, no woman could enter the gate, so Pepita and her father rode on to the estancia of a friend of theirs. Stephen asked to be allowed to dine with the monks, as it would be a novel experience to him. The refectory was a long arched room, dimly lighted. On the walls were pictures of the saints and Scripture scenes. A large crucifix hung at one end, and a reading-desk stood in the centre, from which one of the brothers recited prayers whilst the meal proceeded. The dinner was served upon narrow tables extend-

ing along the room. The prior, a venerable gray-bearded man, presided, and about fifty monks sat down to dine. The food was plentiful, and the Spanish wine circulated freely. Looking at the ample proportions and jovial countenances of the brethren, Stephen thought as he rode on that afternoon that they had little reason to complain of their lot.

The estancia where Don Antonio and his daughter, with the rest of the party, had put up, was the property of a Señor Gomez, who, it appeared, was then at his house at Santa Fé, leaving his country place in charge of his mayordomo, Don Justo Carillos, who with his wife and daughter did their best to entertain the friends of their "patron". The daughter was a very pretty girl of about eighteen, and no sooner had Mick Scanlon cast eyes upon her than he was, as he described it, "struck all of a heap". It seemed indeed to be a case of love at first sight on both sides. The Irishman had now grown a long fair beard, which seemed to be an attraction to the ladies of a race of whom all the men are of dark complexion; besides, he was a past master in the art of "blarney", an accomplishment which is supposed to be characteristic of his countrymen.

Mick could now speak Spanish fluently, if not always grammatically, but with a Milesian accent which excited the amusement of the young lady, and probably materially helped his progress in her affections. The whole of the party derived much entertainment that evening in watching the development into a serious courtship of what appeared at first to be only a simple flirtation.

Very reluctant was poor Mick to leave next morning when the party started, and for hours he could do nothing but talk to Sandy about the charms and grace of Doña Manuelita, until the latter, getting tired of the subject, rated him for his foolishness. "It's just like an Irishman," he said, "tae take up with a lass without ever thinking of hoo he could keep her if he had her. Noo in Scotland

we're better brought up, and taught that we should never fall in love until we see a certain prospect of settling doon, an' I intend tae stick tae that principle."

"Sure an' it's a cold-blooded lot ye are, ye Scotch, always calculating the cost beforehand, and measuring your affections with callipers. Your hearts must be as hard as the boulders on your hills!"

"And the Irishmen's seem tae be as soft as the bogs in their valleys," retorted the Scot.

About the middle of the day Don Antonio's cavalcade galloped into the city of Santa Fé.

It was the hour of the siesta, and it seemed like a city of the dead, so still and deserted was it.

It was a poor-looking place, only some scattered one-story thatched-roof adobe houses; all, however, built on lines of a plan evidently intended to be filled up as streets as the population increased. The roads were loose sand, without side-walks.

"So this is the famous city of Santa Fé," thought Stephen, "the capital of a province, and seat of a governor; and such is its condition after 300 years of occupation by a European power! How different would it have been had the first settlers been of the English race!"

The mean appearance of the town was, however, to a large extent obliterated from their thoughts by the generous hospitality afforded to them by the people. Nothing seemed to be too good to offer, if it added to the comfort of their guests. The few days they rested there were spent in a constant round of social entertainment.

A curious custom prevailed in the town. In the hot evenings all the people, men and women together, of every rank, dressed in flowing garments of white cotton, flocked down to the River Salado, which flows past the town, and there disported themselves for an hour or two. Then they would return, resume their ordinary dress, and spend the evening at tertulias, the ladies allowing their hair to remain

unconfined, and hanging in luxuriant masses down to their waists.

Don Antonio, after about a week, decided to resume his journey. The tropillas of horses were left here, to be sent back under charge of one of the men. The remainder of the party embarked in boats and were ferried down the Salado and across the magnificent Paraná, there about three miles wide. The land on the other side was known as the province of Entreríos (that is, "between the rivers"), as it forms a peninsula between the rivers Paraná and Uruguay.

It was a beautiful well-watered country, a rolling prairie like the land in Uruguay, which they all remembered so well at Las Cruces, with here and there clumps of algarroba-trees. The travelling had now to be made by the use of the horses obtained from the post-houses, and progress was not so rapid, owing to the inferior quality of those animals; nevertheless they accomplished the journey to the city of Corrientes, a distance of about 160 leagues, in about seven days. The city of Corrientes, in style and appearance, was somewhat similar to Santa Fé. It stands near the junction of the Paraná and Paraguay rivers.

The hearts of the travellers beat high, for now they were approaching the promised land.

CHAPTER XXXI

AFTER a day or two's rest the party proceeded on their journey, and having traversed a short stage by land, crossed the broad river Paraná and landed at last in Paraguay.

Soon Stephen saw that Don Antonio, whose description

led him to expect much, had in no way exaggerated the attractions of the country. What a contrast it was to the dead-level plain where they had been spending the past few years! Even the undulating prairie of Entrerios, with its occasional groves of trees, had scarcely prepared him for its beauties.

Paraguay, he saw, was a land of wooded hills and verdant meadows watered by copious streams and placid lakes. Now the travellers would pass under the shade of a tract of vast forest trees, whose sturdy trunks were encircled by flowering parasitic plants. High overhead amongst the branches played troops of chattering monkeys, brilliantly-plumaged parrots, white cockatoos, and great-billed toucans. In graceful festoons gigantic lianas hung from aloft, and clouds of lovely orchids embalmed the air with their fragrance. Soon they would leave the forest and be amongst groves of orange and lemon trees, upon which the golden fruit and white blossoms commingled. Graceful palm-trees waved their umbrella-like fronds over the broad-leaved banana plants. The fig-tree offered its fruit and gave a welcome shade. Gaudily-painted butterflies and humming-birds fluttered in the air, and active little lizards scuttled away from the rocks as our friends advanced. White-washed cottages peeped through the woods, from the midst of plantations of tobacco, mandioca, maize, and sugar-cane, the lofty prickly-pear cactus serving as a very efficient fence to enclose them.

Nor were the people less in contrast to those Stephen had been accustomed to meet on the plains. In place of proud bearded gauchos, grave in temperament and fierce in fight, here were lithe but beardless men, with remarkably small hands and feet, suave and polite almost to excess, and apparently indolent in a high degree, as could be seen from the manner in which they lolled in hammocks in the shade, leaving the women to do most of the work. In movement and carriage the women were surpassingly grace-

ful, which to some extent was accounted for by the universal practice of carrying all burdens on their heads.

Both sexes were clad in garments of white cotton of native manufacture, the dress of the men being merely white shirt and drawers, that of the women a short skirt and a loose upper garment, half-chemise, half-jacket, generally elaborately embroidered, styled the *tepoj*.

They seemed to be of a happy, careless temperament, constantly chattering in their native Guarani language; few understood Spanish, and the sound of song and the twanging of the guitar fell constantly on the ear.

That night the party stayed at a country house, where they were treated with the utmost hospitality and the greatest deference. Their beds were placed on platforms of bamboo, under shady awnings raised on palm trunks to a height of about twenty feet above the ground, in order to secure coolness and avoid the mosquitoes.

It was pretty to see the children of their hosts come one by one, before they retired to rest on their elevated couches, and kneel before their parents to ask their blessing.

Next day their journey was through a constant series of scenes of varying beauty. It was like Arcadia found at last.

As they approached Asuncion they came into roads, sunk below the level of the country, completely arched over for miles by the interlacing of the branches of trees planted on each side. Don Antonio explained to Stephen that originally these avenues had been palisade ways constructed as a defence against the Indians, but that such was the fertility of the climate that the posts used as palisades had taken root and blossomed into these trees, whose shade was now so grateful to the traveller.

At length they reached the capital, a straggling town of white houses with thatched roofs, and each surrounded with a shady veranda, under which the inhabitants sat, or swung in net hammocks. So mild was the climate, Don Antonio said, that the people practically lived in the open

air, and so simple and honest were they in their ways that doors and windows were never fastened.

As Don Antonio's house was only about two miles beyond, they did not stop in the town, but proceeded to it at once. Stephen found it to be of a very different style from those on the estancias in Uruguay and La Plata. It stood in the midst of extensive orchards of orange and lemon trees, peaches, and almonds. Close to the house was a trim flower-garden full of lovely blossoms; the house itself was covered with luxuriant flowering creepers, and vines hung from trellises around it. Like the others, it was built of adobe, and white-washed, with thatched roof. A wide veranda surrounded it, under which the pleasing sight of a dinner-table, spread in readiness for their arrival, met their gaze.

Refreshed by a delicious bath, contrived in a pool close by behind thick hedges, the travellers were ready to do justice to the *al fresco* repast. The variety of meats and the luscious fruits were a welcome change from the everlasting beef diet of the pampas.

To one of a less energetic temperament than Stephen, the life they led at the country house for the next few weeks might have been destructive of all capacity for work in the future. There seems to be something in the Paraguayan atmosphere which disposes one to accept the *dolce far niente* so prevalent amongst the natives of the male sex, and for which the warmth of the climate and the easiness of obtaining a living is some excuse.

The revenues of Señor Rodriguez's Paraguayan estate were derived principally from the products of the *yerba* forests, situated far up the river, and only worked at one season of the year. At other times there was little to do beyond supervising the orchards, which were tended by a host of native women.

In the warm, reposeful afternoons Don Antonio told Stephen something of the history of the country. He had

already related how Asuncion was for years the principal city of the Spaniards, before Buenos Ayres and Monte Video had been founded.

"The original colonists," said Don Antonio, "were mainly Basques from the northern frontiers of Spain, who inter-married with the Guarani Indians, the most handsome and docile tribe of aborigines whom the Spaniards had met in South America. Then came missionaries sent out by the Jesuit authorities in Spain and elsewhere. As you probably know, they soon established a remarkably efficient organization of the Indian population. This has been greatly praised for the work it enabled the Jesuits to do for the aborigines, and it has also been strongly criticized for its shortcomings and failures.

"Originally," continued Don Antonio, "I have no doubt, these missions were founded from a pure desire to spread the gospel and to protect the helpless Indians from their numerous enemies, among whom, it is said, the Portuguese settlers in Brazil were the fiercest and most relentless.

"In course of time the Jesuits came to control the entire Indian population, great areas of land and enormous numbers of cattle and sheep. They were the real rulers of the country, indeed."

"But," interrupted Stephen, "they were expelled at last, were they not? How did that happen?"

"It was like this," replied Don Antonio: "they refused to pay attention to the viceroys and officials sent out by the Spanish authorities, and they even frequently defied them by armed force. Things became so intolerable that Carlos III finally decided upon expulsion of the Order from Spain and her colonies. Secret orders were dispatched to all parts of the Spanish dominions, and everywhere, on the 22nd of July, 1767, the blow was struck. At midnight the Jesuits were awakened, to find their establishments surrounded and themselves made prisoners. Almost to a

man they were sent down to Buenos Ayres and placed on board ships bound for Europe."

"And what has become of their possessions," asked Stephen.

"All gone to rack and ruin," said Don Antonio. "In some respects it is a pity."

CHAPTER XXXII

A MODERN DIONYSIUS

THE account which Don Antonio had given of the Jesuits' mission awoke in Stephen an ardent desire to visit the scene of these famous settlements; so a few days later, accompanied by Sandy and Mick, he rode off on a tour through the district.

He found, as Don Antonio had led him to anticipate, nothing but scenes of desolation and ruin. Nature was smiling and beautiful, as she always is in Paraguay, but her very exuberance had tended to aid the obliteration of man's handiwork.

Near one of the old churches, whose very ruins showed what a magnificent edifice it must have been in the heyday of the Jesuits' prosperity, they met with an old priest, who had lived there, he told them, for more than half a century, and was endeavouring to keep together the few straggling Indians left of the once numerous colony. His name, he said, was Father Anselmo, and he had been brought up by the Jesuits, but escaped expulsion because he was not a member of the Order.

He looked back on the time of their sway with unceasing regret, and tears would flow down his venerable face as he recounted the events of the expulsion, some forty-five years before, and the subsequent ruin of the settlements.

"Ah!" said he, "the Jesuits, whatever may have been their faults, were at least kind masters to these poor people. How different it has been under the rapacious treatment of those who came after them! The present administrator of the territory, for example, Don Ignacio Lopez, who has only recently been sent up, is a demon in human form."

"What!" exclaimed Stephen, "Don Ignacio Lopez! Must that villain for ever be coming across my path!"

"Then you know him, señor," replied Father Anselmo; "so there will be no need for me to tell you what sort of a man he is. I hear that he rendered some valuable service to the Government when the English were in Monte Video, so they have given him this post as a reward. But he has never concealed his dislike to the life, and he is trying to wring everything he can out of the unfortunate people. He works them to death, and robs them of every scrap of property and their wages as far as he can."

"Ah, if he only knew it!" continued Father Anselmo mysteriously. "There is not far from here something which would enrich him far beyond his dreams, but he will never hear of it while I live. No tortures will wring from me the secret."

"What can the old man mean?" thought Stephen. "Is it a treasure which the Jesuits concealed before they left?"

But, finding further enquiries and speculations to be useless, he dropped the subject, and bade the old priest farewell.

Another trip which Stephen made not long afterwards, at the request of Don Antonio, was to the yerba plantations, in which his friend had large interests.

He went up the river in a canoe, pulled by four strong natives, a journey of ten days of utter misery, caused by the intense heat and the assaults of biting insects, to a place named Villa Real. This he found to be an utterly desolate hole, full of heat, stench, and malaria, and he was glad to be able to start at once for the Yerbales. For four days he rode through dense tangled forests, the haunt of the jaguar and venomous serpents, where the clothes of the traveller were apt to be torn to pieces by thorns, and his flesh blistered by mosquitoes. At length he emerged on the high ground amidst the characteristic land-

scape of Paraguay, where grew in abundant clumps the famous yerba-tree, a species of holly.

Here Stephen found gangs of men laboriously engaged in the heavy task of cutting off the branches, and carrying them for long distances to the camp, where the leaves were stripped and roasted, pounded to fragments, and then packed into bags of raw hide.

Terrible were the sufferings and privations of the poor yerba gatherers from the heat and insects and the difficulty of getting supplies, but nevertheless nothing seemed capable of repressing their natural gaiety, and they twanged the guitar and sang songs round the camp fires at night.

"I propose," said Don Antonio to Stephen one evening after his return, "to pay a visit to a gentleman who has recently taken up his residence near us, and if you like you can come with me. I think he will interest you, as he is one of the most remarkable men in the country."

Stephen intimated his willingness to go, and asked Don Antonio to give him some particulars about their new neighbour.

"His name," said Don Antonio, "is Dr. Gaspar Rodriguez Francia. He is a native of this country, but was educated at the University of Cordoba, in La Plata. His parents intended him to be a priest, but he chose instead to be a lawyer, and in this I think he acted wisely, for he has acquired the reputation of being the cleverest lawyer in Paraguay, and what is more, in my estimation, he bears an honourable name as being incorruptible, which, unfortunately, cannot be said of all the lawyers here. This has been proved upon many occasions, as he has been known to allow his own private interests to suffer in order to defend the case of his personal enemy, even when offered heavy bribes to keep silence.

"But this is not all," went on Don Antonio; "he is a strange character indeed. Far off as we are from Europe,

he follows every event which passes there with the keenest interest. He reads several languages, and has gone to the considerable expense of having the principal European papers sent out to him regularly. Then he is a student of the sciences, and has acquired such a varied knowledge that it is little wonder that the people of such an ignorant country as this look upon him as a magician."

"But how comes it," said Stephen, "that such a man should be living in retirement at a country house?"

"Ah! replied Don Antonio, "there is a history attached to that too. When, last year, the provinces of La Plata declared their independence from Spain, there was naturally some commotion caused up here. Now Spain had never kept a strong force in Paraguay, trusting probably to the well-known docility of the people, which renders them loyal to almost any form of authority. So when the news came that Buenos Ayres had thrown off its allegiance to the mother-country, the Paraguayans were bewildered. They scarcely knew what side to take. They therefore took a middle course, and appointed a committee of three prominent citizens to administer the affairs of the country, to decide later on, when they should see how matters went, whether they would adhere to Spain or side with the revolting colonies. Dr. Francia was appointed the secretary and assessor of this committee, as no one better fitted for the position could have been found, and it is rumoured that he has constantly advocated that the junta, that is the committee, should declare for the entire independence of Paraguay, not only from Spain, but from all the other colonies. As the junta have not been able to make up their minds to take this bold step, he is reported to have retired in disgust."

With curiosity fired by the description he had just heard, Stephen got quickly ready to walk with Don Antonio to Dr. Francia's house.

On the way Don Antonio explained that Dr. Francia was

a bachelor, and lived entirely alone, so that he must not expect to find many elegancies in his abode.

They found the doctor standing in front of his door gazing at the stars, which had just begun to make their appearance through the twilight. He welcomed Señor Rodriguez cordially, and accorded a gracious bow to Stephen when he was introduced.

The ex-secretary of the junta was of striking appearance. He was a man of about fifty, of tall gaunt figure, a stern mould of countenance, a high forehead and penetrating dark eyes. His luxuriant black hair, thrown carelessly back from his brow, fell in natural ringlets over his shoulders. He was dressed in a suit of black, with large gold buckles at his knees and on his shoes, while over his shoulders he had thrown a scarlet cloak.

His bearing was dignified, and he spoke with gravity and deliberation. At times, however, a smile would light up his countenance and give it an irresistible charm.

The conversation at first related to astronomy, the doctor apparently taking no small pride in displaying his knowledge by pointing out the principal constellations and stars; but suddenly remembering his duties as a host, he invited Don Antonio and Stephen to enter the house. The room into which he introduced them was evidently his study. On the table lay heaps of papers, and some ponderous volumes bound in vellum, obviously works on law, which he had just been consulting. A great silver inkstand and numerous quill pens stood in the middle, and in front of the chair, from which Doctor Francia had evidently recently risen, was an unfinished draft of a legal document.

The room was furnished in very simple style. Besides the table, there were only some massive wooden chairs with high carved backs, seated with stamped leather. The floor was laid with brick-red flat tiles, and was without carpet or mat. It was strewn with fragments of torn letters, and slippers, boots, and shoes lay scattered about. In one

corner stood the doctor's horse-gear on a trestle, in another a celestial globe and a theodolite. But the most attractive feature of the room was the library, consisting of about three or four hundred books, standing upon a set of rough shelves on the wall behind Dr. Francia's chair.

The usual civilities of presenting the guests with the maté cup and cigars, brought in by a little negro boy, having been observed, the talk at once fell upon the books, a subject which more than any other appeared to interest their host.

Dr. Francia invited Stephen to come up closer to inspect them. The lower shelf was principally filled with ponderous works on law, bound in calf, but the collection above was of a miscellaneous character. It included the works of Voltaire, Rousseau, Volney, Diderot, and other philosophical French writers, several treatises upon astronomy, mathematics, and the inductive sciences, also in the French language, and numerous works in Spanish and in Latin. Stephen's education was not at that time sufficiently advanced to enable him to appreciate the scope and tendency of these works, but he understood enough to form a high idea of the doctor's learning.

Don Antonio, however, knew enough of the books to enable him to discuss their contents with their owner.

It was evident from the discourse that Dr. Francia had a great admiration for Voltaire.

"There was a man," he exclaimed, "who saw things clearly, and who was brave enough to proclaim his opinions even though they were against the views held by the great majority. No tyrant, no priest could stop him!"

Of Diderot and the other precursors of the French Revolution he also spoke approvingly, but against the ecclesiastics, and especially the Jesuits, he uttered a bitter tirade.

Stephen observed that he held the same ideas with regard to the operations of that order in Paraguay as had already

been expressed by Don Antonio, only the doctor was more bitter with regard to them. The conversation flowed on with references to recent and current events, and Don Francia displayed a remarkable acquaintance with the history of the French Revolution and of men and affairs in France. He became quite enthusiastic when he spoke of Napoleon.

“What a genius is that little Corsican!” he cried. “He knows exactly what he is aiming at and how to accomplish his wishes. He has the true idea of how to govern; for the mass of the people never know what is best for them and their country. They must be directed by one master mind and compelled to obey his instructions.” And then he proceeded to trace the events of the emperor’s career with many admiring comments.

Don Antonio had avoided speaking of the affairs of Paraguay, knowing the delicate nature of the topic, but Dr. Francia introduced it himself and spoke freely. For the men then in power he expressed the highest contempt, characterizing them as perfect ignoramuses, without a policy, or sufficient ideas to frame one. He dwelt also upon the ineptitude of the men at the head of affairs at Buenos Ayres and Monte Video, and called attention to the numerous disorders and disregard of the law which had happened in these countries in consequence of the want of proper control.

“Until a strong hand is on the bridle,” he said, “I can foresee nothing but years of seething anarchy before them, and the best policy for Paraguay will be to keep entirely aloof from their struggles. What need have we of them, or to be mixed up with their affairs? Have we not in this country of our own all that man requires for sustenance, clothing, and every other want? Our people are industrious and docile—much easier to rule than their fierce gauchos, who are all more or less bandits by nature. Believe me, Señor Rodriguez, Paraguay’s best policy is to isolate herself entirely and live on her resources. The hour has come for it, but where is the man?”

As they walked homewards Don Antonio and Stephen discussed with much interest the remarkable words they had heard from Dr. Francia. "He is certainly a wonderful man," said Don Antonio, "and is, I feel sure, destined to play a great part in the affairs of this country. He is undoubtedly a genius, some think a madman; and the curious thing is, that he is of very obscure origin, and none can fathom whence is derived his extraordinary talent."

CHAPTER XXXIII

ELYSIUM AND MAMMON

HAD Stephen been a classical scholar, he would certainly have thought that in Paraguay he had found the land of the Lotus Eaters. Life there, at that time, flowed on so pleasantly and so dreamily that even the most energetic felt themselves to be gradually losing their activity and ambitions. Society, if not highly cultured, was sympathetic and agreeable in a simple way. No one was either really poor or very rich, and all had ample time upon their hands for social intercourse, and enjoyed it to the fullest.

Don Antonio was one of the most influential and popular men in the country. He and his friends were asked everywhere, and scarcely an evening passed in which they were not attending some party or extending hospitality at the *quinta* (country villa).

The entertainment on such occasions was much more varied than at the tertulias which Stephen remembered at Monte Video. The Paraguayans were a music-loving people, and had many lyrics and melodies of their own. They had, besides, several dances peculiar to the country, in which only one couple took part, to the tinkling accompaniment of a guitar. In these there was much scope for

the introduction of graceful skill and fancy, inasmuch as they were symbolical of love and the course of courtship. The suitor would sometimes advance gallantly, only to find his partner retire coyly, and then he would have to picture his despair, and by expressive gestures display his various artifices to win the lady's favour, which would sometimes appear to be about to be granted, but would again be withdrawn with playful coquetry, until at last he carried her off triumphantly, unless in the meantime he had been cut out by some bolder and more attractive rival. The rest of the company would watch the performance with great enjoyment, from time to time applauding when some particularly novel or ingenious ruse or movement was introduced.

When tired of the dance, it was always a delight to wander forth into the garden under the dark-blue sky and brilliant stars, and enjoy the warm soft air, redolent of the perfume of orange blossoms, of myrtles, and other delightfully-scented plants, while listening to the deep-toned songs of the night-birds.

But Stephen felt that it would not be right for him to drop into a careless repose in this elysium without remembrance of the past or thought of the future. He was now a young man, verging upon twenty-one years of age, with his way in life still to make. He had not forgotten that in his farewell letter to his mother he had promised to try to make a fortune quickly and to return to her; but above all, he was anxious to achieve a position soon which might enable him to realize his secret ambition, the dearest wish of his life, that of being able to ask for the hand of Pepita.

He spoke of his ideas to Don Antonio one morning, expressing to him his gratitude for the many kindnesses which his friend had rendered him, but saying that he had resolved that he should now take steps to gain independence by his own exertions, and he asked for the old gentleman's advice.

“I am glad you mentioned the subject to me,” said Don

Antonio. "It shows that you have the spirit which I like to see in a young man. Fortunately I am able to show you a way whereby you should easily be able to accomplish your desire."

Don Antonio went on to explain his scheme. He pointed out that, as Stephen had probably also observed, Paraguay was teeming with produce, much of which was entirely lost for want of a ready market, and what was actually exported was sold at exceedingly low prices for that very reason. His project was that Stephen should go down to Buenos Ayres and charter a suitable vessel to come up the river, and at the same time enter into arrangements for the sale of its cargo when it returned, or for its shipment to Europe. "There are now," said Don Antonio, "several English mercantile houses at Buenos Ayres which would willingly undertake such business."

Don Antonio promised that when Stephen was away upon this errand, he would, for his part, occupy himself with the purchase of enough produce to load the vessel.

Stephen was delighted with the project, which was clearly one likely to bring lucrative results. He had frequently thought of such a plan before, and the practical difficulty which had stood in the way of its accomplishment had now been removed by Don Antonio placing his capital and credit at his disposal.

Señor Rodriguez then explained his proposals for the division of the profits, and Stephen was more than satisfied with the generous share which was to be allotted to him. "I intend also," added Don Antonio, "that your two countrymen shall participate in this enterprise, for I do not forget that they, too, took part in the rescue of my daughter and myself from certain death. Besides, they will be able to render us most useful services in the work of collecting and shipping the produce when the time comes."

The two sailors were delighted with the news, and thanked Don Antonio cordially for his kindness.

Within a few days Stephen and his two companions started upon their long journey, full of high spirits and hopes.

Their instructions were, that after they had done their business at Buenos Ayres, they were to pay a visit for some weeks to the estancia El Porvenir to see how the business was progressing, for though Don Antonio had full confidence in his mayordomo, unfortunately the latter could neither read nor write, and so had been unable to report the state of affairs to his patron.

As the vessel they would send might take between three and four months to ascend the river, no time would be lost in their making this excursion. They were further instructed to bring back Don Cayetano with them, both with the object of conferring with Don Antonio upon the future management of the estancia, and also to aid them in guarding the large amount in silver and gold which it would be necessary to bring up to Paraguay in order to pay for the produce bought.

The party accomplished their journey as far as Santa Fé, through the scenes which have already been described, without extraordinary incidents. But at that place Mick begged his companions to make a détour from the straight route in order to pay a visit to the house of the maiden who had so charmed him on the upward journey. Nothing could exceed his delight when they complaisantly acceded to his request, nor his enthusiasm at the prospect of the meeting. For hours he would sing the praises of his lady-love:—"Isn't she a darlint?" "Did ye ever see such beauty?" "Och, mavourneen, how I'm longing to see your sweet eyes!"

But all he could wring out of the phlegmatic Scotchman was such remarks as: "Aye, she's no such an ill-lookin' lassie. I hae seen waur!"

Mick's reception by the Carillos family was all that he could have desired. During the evening that the party

spent there he made rapid progress in the good graces of Doña Manuelita, and when they retired to rest—though for Mick it was not to sleep—it seemed as though everything was going as well as he could have wished.

Nor was he disappointed next morning when he broached the subject to Don Justo, and made formal application for his daughter's hand. He was now able to assure him that he had some settled prospects, and the father, having learned that Mick was a good Catholic, readily gave his consent.

Mick was neither "to hold nor to bind" for the rest of that day, and the unfortunate horses he rode had a rough time of it as he went circling round his companions whooping for very joy, much to the amazement of the solemn Sandy, who declared that "He had ne'er seen a man gae sae clean gite owre a bit lassie! Wait till ye're marrit a year or sae," he warned his excited comrade, "an I'se warrant ye'll no be crying sae crouse. Maybe the lauch 'ill be on the ither side o' yer face!"

No untoward incident marred their progress as they rode rapidly on past the monastery of San Lorenzo and the town of Rosario, and continued in lengthy stages until they reached Buenos Ayres four days later.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN INDIAN RAID

THE business arrangements at Buenos Ayres did not take long to complete, as Don Antonio had predicted, and in less than a week Stephen had the satisfaction of knowing that the schooner *Tridente* was preparing to start up the river for Asuncion, while Messrs. Macdonald, Graham, and Co. were getting together the coin which would have to be taken back with them to Paraguay.

At El Porvenir they found that all things had been going on in the most satisfactory way during their absence. Thanks to the vigilance of Don Cayetano but few horses had been stolen, while the sheep and cattle had progressed wonderfully both in condition and numbers.

But Stephen could not bear to stay long on these dull, level plains, in spite of their money-making attractions. He longed to return to the Arcadian beauty of Paraguay, above all, to be once more with Pepita, and, as may readily be believed, Mick was quite as anxious to be near his own divinity.

So within a fortnight they were once more on the road to the north, accompanied by Don Cayetano and two mules bearing a precious load of specie.

As rapidly as horses could carry them they pushed on their journey, and when they at last reached San Lorenzo, Mick's impatience became uncontrollable, and, mounting a fresh horse, he started on ahead so as to abbreviate as far as possible the interval which lay between him and the attractive face of Doña Manuelita.

It was with profound astonishment that his companions met him within a league of Don Justo's house, riding back at a tearing speed; but when he came near they saw from his face that something very serious had happened.

For a few moments he was too excited to speak; but soon he broke forth with: "The murthering villains! They've killed them all and burnt the house!" winding up with a cry of despair so terrible as to strike all hearts.

Putting spurs to their horses the party rushed forward until they came in sight of where the house had stood, when an appalling sight met their gaze.

Of the house nothing was left but a few blackened walls, borne down by the embers of the still smoking roof. In front of it lay on its back the corpse of Don Justo, but of men and animals nothing was to be seen.

The quick eye of Don Cayetano was able to interpret

the meaning of the scene at once. Riding up to the house and making a few short circles round it, keeping his eyes to the ground, he returned to the others and briefly said:

“ Indians! Been here yesterday! Carried off the cattle! Have got a good start!”

The sound of voices led to another surprise, when they saw a figure cautiously emerge from a ditch close by, which they soon recognized to be that of an old woman whom they remembered as a servant at the house. She was in a woeful condition, having spent the night lying in terror at the bottom of the ditch, not daring to move, and she now broke down into piteous wailings. At length they were able to elicit the story from her incoherent words, constantly interrupted by songs and lamentations.

In the afternoon of the previous day a band of Indians had suddenly ridden up to the house yelling terribly, and almost before they could realize it the house was fired, poor Don Justo had fallen with several lance-thrusts in his body, and the band were driving away the cattle almost as quickly as they had come. The *señora*, the old woman said, was, fortunately for her, away on a visit to Santa Fé, but “ *Dios Mio!*” she cried, “ they have carried away the *señorita*! Ay de mí, por la pobre Doña Manuelita!”

Mick's grief and excitement were terrible, and it was as much as his companions could do to restrain him from galloping off madly upon the trail of the Indians.

Stephen appealed to Don Cayetano for advice. Before replying, the tracker spent some minutes in carefully reconnoitring the ground, and then, turning to the old woman, he asked her to give some description of the Indians.

She had been too excited and terrified to take particular notice, but recollectcd that they had all bands of plaited straw, or something like it, round their heads.

“ *Ha!*” said Cayetano. “ As I thought, Tobas. And about a hundred of them as nearly as I can guess from their tracks.” He then explained to Stephen that the Toba

Indians were the fiercest and most formidable tribe of these regions, tall, athletic, and active—a very dangerous foe to tackle. Their distinguishing mark was the band round the head which the old woman had mentioned.

"I strongly advise you," he said, "not to attempt to follow them with the idea of rescuing the young woman. What is done is done! It is a pity, but what could you do against such a horde?"

Mick, however, would not listen for a moment to the proposal to leave his sweetheart to her fate, and cried that if nobody else would try he would go by himself, come what might. Nor could Stephen or Sandy bear the thought of not making an attempt to save the poor girl from her terrible position.

"Well," said at last Don Cayetano, "whatever you decide to do, my duty is clear, that is to guard Don Antonio's money and to take it to him as quickly as possible. As for catching up with these Indians, that would be easy enough. The track is so clear that anyone could follow it, and as they cannot travel fast when driving cattle before them, you would soon overtake them. But I advise you not to try, as I can show you a much better plan if you will go. I know this country well, I have been all over it in my youth. The *tolderias* (villages) of the Tobas are about thirty leagues from here due west. Now what I think you should do is to go right to the chief *tolderia* of the Mataco tribe, which is about the same distance from here, but to the north-west. You will easily find the road by turning due north after you have crossed the second *arroyo* (stream) you meet. The Matacos are the hereditary enemies of the Tobas, and when they hear that the latter have carried off a good spoil, they will easily be persuaded to attack them when they are feasting over their victory."

Stephen and his friends saw that Don Cayetano was right, and that this would be their best chance, so they resolved to follow his advice.

Don Cayetano rode off with his treasure-laden mules towards Santa Fé, and promised to send out soldiers from the town to protect the people and bury the body of poor Don Justo, while Stephen and his two companions struck out in the other direction in search of the Matacos' villages.

By carefully following Don Cayetano's directions they came that evening in sight of the object of their quest.

Acting still according to the instructions of the tracker, as soon as they saw that the Indians had perceived their approach, they dismounted and stood still, and put their guns, which they had been carrying slung across their shoulders, down upon the ground, and waited until the Indian spokesman came within hail. Then they crossed their arms upon their chests and bowed three times to the ground.

To their great relief the Indian who had come out as a herald laid down his lance and also bowed three times. He then addressed them in Spanish, which indicated to Stephen that a great part of their difficulties had been removed.

Slowly the Indian approached them and asked them what they wanted, and if they were friends.

Stephen in a few words told him that they had come to give their noble tribe a chance to revenge themselves upon the miserable Tobas.

At the sound of the hated name the eyes of the Indian flashed, and he became visibly more interested, though still preserving his imperturbable gravity.

Stephen asked him how he came to speak Spanish, and he replied that when a boy he had been taken prisoner and made to serve for some years in the Spanish army.

This was a common practice of the Spaniards, but they always took care to employ their Indian troops in places far remote from their own country.

The Indian then invited them to follow him into the village.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE TOLDERIA OF THE MATAkos

AS they approached the village Stephen saw that it was composed of a large number of huts (*toldos*) built of post and wattle, with strong thatched roofs. These dwellings were long and low, the walls being only about four feet high, with a door on one side through which a fire could be seen burning in the middle of the floor of each. They were built at irregular intervals along the fringe of a dense wood which covered a gently-sloping eminence. This was a custom universally followed by the Indians of those countries, for two reasons: first, that as they were always exposed to attack, and the Indian tactics of warfare were entirely those of surprises, the wood behind, with its intricate paths, afforded them a means of escape if too severely pressed; second, that the bean of the algarroba-tree, of which these woods were mainly composed, is the principal article of sustenance amongst those tribes.

In front of each hut stood, fixed into the ground, the lance of the owner of the house, and Stephen observed with rather a creepy feeling that from these lances frequently hung a bunch of scalps, recognizable by the long lock of black hair and the ghastly fragments of skin still adhering to it. On one side, just outside the door-post, stood the Indian's bow and arrows and his heavy wooden club. It was difficult to comprehend why the Indians adhered to this custom of thus leaving their weapons exposed. For they must have known by experience that the first step taken by their enemies when about to attack a village is to send forward scouts, who, crawling in like serpents under cover of the night, seize the lances, clubs, and bows as they pass each door, and thus leave the inmates without means of defence. Only the conservatism of immemorial usage can account for it.

As they slowly followed their guide towards the centre of the village, leading their horses by the bridles, the Englishmen saw that they were curiously watched by groups of women and children in front of each hut. They were of a dark coppery colour, and some of the younger women would have been good-looking but for their having tattooed their faces in dark-blue lines so closely as almost to conceal the true colour of their skin.

Their dress consisted, in most instances, of only a short skirt or kilt, made from deer-skins, still with the hair on, and generally in a very filthy condition. Some, however, wore, in addition, dark-blue cloaks of woollen material somewhat like ponchos. All had the lobes of their ears bored, into the slits of which were thrust pieces of wood or stones. Their long, black hair was plaited into two tails which hung down their backs. Their general attitude was a standing position, with their hands resting upon their breasts.

Children up to about eight years of age ran about quite naked. Those still in infancy were tied to boards and hung each on its mother's back, suspended by a thong passing over its forehead.

No men were yet visible; they had gone, the guide explained, to the centre of the village, where burned the council fire, a great pile of wood in an open space, which had been lit, and a summons given by beating the "pimpim" (a species of drum formed by stretching a sheep-skin over a large earthen pot), when the news had spread that "Christians" (so the Indians call all of European race) were approaching the village.

Round the fire, Stephen saw that the warriors had collected in rows, all squatted upon the ground smoking their pipes in solemn silence. Stephen noted that they were short, broad men, with remarkable development of arms and shoulders. Some wore blue, woollen ponchos, but the majority were naked with the exception of a belt of

deer-skin round the loins, or a skin thrown over their shoulders.

The guide told them to tie up their horses and to approach.

Stephen took the precaution to whisper quickly to his companions each to sit upon a different side of the fire, so that they might be able to warn each other if there were any indications of an attack from behind upon any one of them. The interpreter took his place by Stephen's side.

Presently an old man spoke. He was evidently the "cacique", or chief, being adorned with a circlet of ostrich plumes on his head and armlets of smaller feathers above the elbows, and the interpreter told Stephen to proceed with his story.

Briefly Stephen told, and the interpreter repeated, how the Tobas had the previous day attacked Don Justo's house, killed him, carried away his daughter, and driven off some hundreds of head of cattle and horses.

The killing of the owner and the abduction of the daughter did not appear to affect the Indians in the least, but grunts and glances told of their excitement when they heard of the stolen cattle.

After a long palaver, in which many of the men took part, the interpreter at last informed Stephen that they had resolved to take away the cattle from their enemies, and asked if the "Christians" would help with their fire-arms, and if so, what share of the booty would they ask as a reward.

Great was the surprise of the Indians when Stephen replied that the only condition would be that the young woman who had been carried off should be handed to them.

The Matacos had expected much heavier demands, and they seemed to think that these "Christians" were indeed simpletons.

The interpreter now informed them that it had been

resolved to call to their aid all the rest of the tribe, and that this would occupy the whole of the next day.

Stephen soon observed that messengers on horseback were being despatched in several directions, each bearing a bundle of twigs twisted in a peculiar manner, and smeared with the blood of a goat which had been killed for the purpose.

That night they were assigned quarters in one of the toldos. Their interpreter explained that it was the custom of his people for the oldest members of the family, such as the grandparents, to be nearest to the fire, the places of the others being assigned by seniority, and strangers coming remotest of all.

The hut to which Stephen was shown was certainly far from inviting, being filthy in the extreme. All the bones of the animals which had been eaten from time to time seemed to have been thrown upon the earthen floor and left there to fester.

Long before morning he was unable to endure the horrible stench from these and the bodies of the sleepers, the heat, smoke, and fleas, and was glad to make up a bed from his horse-gear and sleep under the open sky. He could not help comparing these people unfavourably with the cleanly and genial Tehuelches of Patagonia.

Early next day, upon the invitation of the interpreter, Stephen and his companions went to the top of a neighbouring hill, upon which the Indians had built a large fire and were making signals to their friends by means of smoke. This they did at intervals, throwing on the fire an armful of green wood. Away on the horizon, though he would scarcely have noticed them had they not been pointed out by their Indian guide, similar puffs of smoke were rising from various points. These the Indians appeared to read quite intelligibly, and to understand to mean that the messengers who had been sent off the previous night had arrived, and that each village had agreed to send its contingent.

In the afternoon the bands of warriors began to pour in, and soon there were some hundreds of men assembled, all in war array. Each had put on his war-paint, which had also been assumed during the day by the men in their own tolderia. This was done by blackening their faces with charcoal-dust mixed with fat, while across their forehead and in line with the mouth were drawn two red bands about an inch wide. In such garb the Indians looked horribly fierce.

It was evident that there was to be little repose that night, for preparations were being made for a great feast. Several mares had been slaughtered, and great joints were roasting at various fires. The warriors, each as they arrived, were presented with a bumper of mare's blood in a cow-horn, which they quaffed with great gusto. Probably this was a symbolical rite. But the excitement was not merely to be kept up by the anticipations of fighting and plunder, for near every fire stood a large earthenware jar filled with a liquor which the interpreter said was a fermented drink made from algarroba beans, and of this the Indians heartily partook, using cow-horns as drinking-vessels. Stephen tried some of the stuff, but found it utterly unpalatable (probably, had he known how it was made, he would not have ventured to taste it). However, the warriors appeared to relish it exceedingly.

Mick and Sandy were also unable to stomach it. Mick said it reminded him of the story of an Indian who once described drinks as being of two kinds, "the one good for 'drinky', the other good for 'drunky'." "I expect," he said, "that this aloja, as they call it, is of the last kind, judging from the results upon these bhoys."

As the night wore on, the effect of the libations became more and more pronounced. The Indians had lost their habitual gravity of demeanour, and gave vent at times to their rising spirits by exclamations and cries.

At length, upon a signal given by the chief, the whole

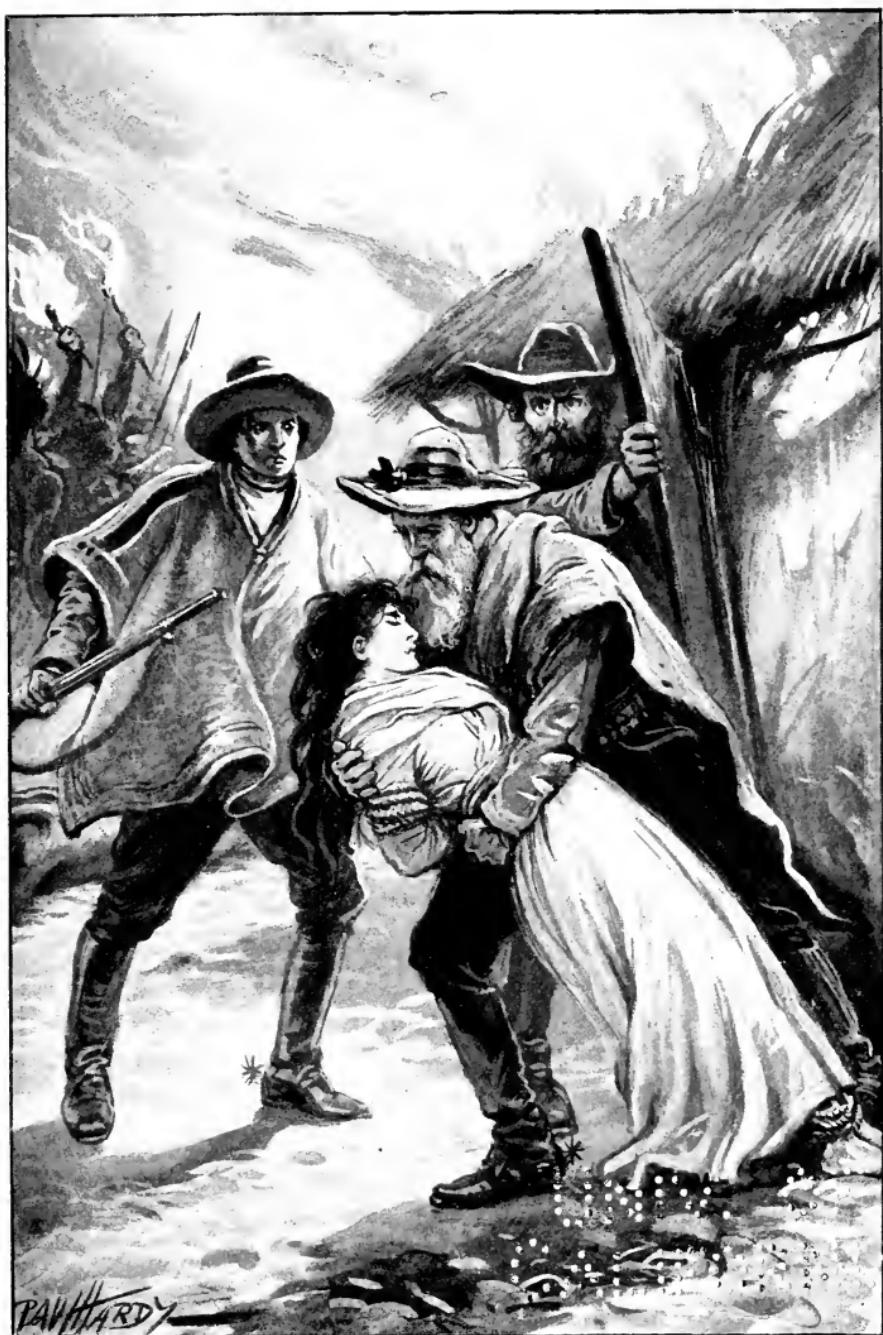
assembly rose and began the war-dance. Each Indian grasped his weapons, and then the warriors who were to take part in the expedition formed in circles round the fires, with intervals of about a yard and a half between each man. Slowly they began to move round the fire, at first in silence, then to the accompaniment of a monotonous chant, which, however, soon grew in volume and rapidity of utterance. Then one man would take up the leadership, while the whole band would regularly join in the refrain as a chorus. Stephen would notice that the leader usually had a bunch of scalps hanging from his girdle, from which he would take one at a time and address to it a long song. The interpreter told him that he was recounting the story of how he had won it, and promising to capture many more. Gradually the excitement increased. The Indians would clash their weapons together, uttering loud yells. It was a weird sight to watch their dark forms circulating in the firelight to such an accompaniment. For hours did the dance go on, until, utterly worn out, the warriors lay down, and, wrapping themselves in their blankets, fell into a profound sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE RESCUE OF MANUELITA

AT early dawn the expedition started, Stephen and his companions, attended by the interpreter, riding near the cacique.

For the greater part of the day they rode rapidly on, being in their own country and under no need of concealment, but at length in the afternoon they drew up in a thick algarroba wood, in which they carefully hid themselves and horses and lay down to rest, after having planted sentries at the outskirts.



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THE RESCUE OF MANUELITA

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As evening began to come on, scouts were selected to reconnoitre the enemy, whose tolderia, Stephen now learned, was about a league off. These men went out on foot, and each was chosen on account of the ability he had previously shown for such work. The interpreter told Stephen that it was simply marvellous what some of them could do, travelling for miles like snakes in the grass, without giving the slightest indication of their presence. As a proof, he pointed out that some of them had actually corns on their elbows.

Away they went, and vanished instantly from sight. For the next few hours Stephen and his friends were in a state of nervous tension, but nothing seemed to disturb the stolidity of the Indians. Keenly as Stephen watched the direction in which the scouts had gone, he was unable to make out a movement or to distinguish the slightest sound, until he was startled by the sudden uprising of a dark figure almost at his feet. Soon this scout was followed by the others, and all went in a body to the chief.

The Englishmen then heard from the interpreter that all was going on in the enemy's camp as they had anticipated. Following the usual custom of Indians after a successful raid, they were now indulging in a gluttonous orgie, and appeared not to have the slightest suspicion of danger. They were lying about the fires completely gorged with beef, and mostly drunk with aloja. Upon such occasions it is the custom of the women to take away the weapons and hide them, lest those who become irascible in their cups should attack and injure their friends. Everything indicated that the Tobas would become an easy prey if the blow were struck at once.

The chief of the Matacos lost no time in making his dispositions. He divided his forces into four parties. Three of the divisions were to attack the Tobas' village from different directions, the fourth was to keep up the hill behind the sheltering wood and to cut off the retreat

of any who might try to escape in that direction. The signal for the attack was to be given by this party, as they had the farthest distance to travel. Their commander was to throw up a blazing branch in the air when they had reached their position.

In profound silence the first three troops rode off, and soon afterwards the force led by the cacique, with whom Stephen had remained, took the route slowly towards the doomed village.

After a long halt within half a mile of the tolderia, the fires of which could be distinctly seen through the darkness, the anxiously-awaited signal was perceived. In an instant every man was in saddle, and with blood-curdling yells the Matacos charged upon their enemy's village.

What followed in the next few minutes can be better imagined than described. It was not a fight, but a massacre. The panic which seized upon the Tobas was appalling, and was rendered even more terrifying, if that were possible, by the shots which Stephen and his friends fired into the crowd round the fires. Each carried a gun and two double-barrelled pistols, which caused the Tobas to yell "Los Christianos! Los Christianos!" Evidently they thought they were being attacked by Spanish troops sent out to avenge the raid.

Leaving to their Indian allies the work of slaughter, Stephen and his friends at once went in search of Manuelita. Some of the Matacos had taken brands from the fires, and set the thatch of the toldos alight, and soon the flames added to the terror of the scene.

No women had been seen round the camp fires, and the unfortunate girl, they concluded, must therefore be, if in the village at all, within one of the huts, which were now becoming like blazing furnaces, and she was perhaps in imminent risk of a terrible death.

Like madmen, Stephen, Mick, and Sandy rushed from hut to hut, and at length, with a triumphant yell, Mick

dragged his sweetheart from a tolda, just in time to save her from being caught by the fall of the burning roof.

She was in a deplorable state, bound hand and foot with hide ropes, so as to prevent her from trying to escape during the feast, when vigilance might be relaxed, and almost dead with terror from the new attack, of which she could not, of course, understand the meaning.

Her joy upon recognizing Mick was most affecting, though for a time she was almost swooning from the effects of the severe mental and physical strain which she had undergone during the previous few days.

The triumph of the Matacos was complete, and was now being celebrated by them with excited yells, while some of them were engaged in the ghastly work of scalping their fallen foes. No quarter had been given. So far as Stephen could judge from the appearance of the bodies, the Tobas seemed to have been a much more handsome race than the tribe with which chance had thrown him into alliance. Tall and well-proportioned, with handsome features even in death, Stephen could not help, in spite of the circumstances, regretting their wholesale destruction.

Quickly the Matacos began collecting the cattle, so as to be able to get away before the alarm could spread amongst the allies of the Tobas. Soon after morning the whole tribe were well on their homeward route, driving their booty before them. Manuelita was placed on Mick's horse, he riding behind and carefully holding her in his arms.

On the evening of the second day, their pace having been delayed by the cattle, they arrived at the Matacos' tolderia, and were welcomed by loud cries of rejoicing.

CHAPTER XXXVII

UNEXPECTED DIFFICULTIES

STEPHEN had imagined that the Matacos would now thank them for their services, and allow him, with his friends and Manuelita, to take their departure. He did not, however, understand the Indian nature; for when he proposed, after giving the young woman a few days to recover strength for the journey, that they should make a start, he was met with unexpected opposition from the chief.

At first the reasons given for this were veiled in hospitality—a pretence that they wished to have more of their “Christian” friends’ society—but soon the real truth came out. The fact was that the Indians had seen what a powerful assistance to victory over their enemies was the use of the firearms so skilfully handled by the Englishmen. As they were wholly without metals, their lances and arrows being tipped with deer-horn, there was nothing the Indians so much coveted as the knives, sabres, and guns of the “Christians”. But the Spaniards had always made it a strict rule—a wise one, Stephen considered—never to allow the Indians to have such weapons. Now, however, the Matacos saw a chance of not only having at their disposal these deadly implements, but also men who knew how to use them, and who could, they believed, be compelled to fight in their service. So they had made up their minds that they would attach these “Christians” permanently to their tribe.

Great was the alarm of the Englishmen when they discovered these intentions and realized that they were virtually captives, watched day and night by ever-vigilant eyes.

Stephen saw that escape was impossible in the cir-

cumstances unless some unlooked-for chance should present itself. He therefore counselled his friends to appear to take no notice, but to be constantly on the alert for an opportunity to make a dash for freedom.

Some miserable weeks were spent in this trying position, during which the Englishmen joined the Indians in their hunting and fishing expeditions, and did everything they could to allay any suspicion of their design. But they observed that they were so carefully kept under guard that any attempt at evasion would instantly have been detected.

Had they been alone they might have chanced a break-away when distant from the camp, trusting for success to their superior arms, but they could not think of deserting Manuelita. At last Stephen resolved to try other tactics, and through the interpreter he asked the cacique what terms he would accept for their ransom. Finally, after long and irritating negotiations, it was agreed that they should give the Indians twenty guns and a supply of ammunition; also about a dozen knives and a quantity of scrap-iron, from which they could manufacture spear-points and arrow-heads.

To ensure that this bargain would be carried out the cacique stipulated that one of them should remain as a hostage until the arms and other articles had been delivered. Now came the delicate point of selecting the hostage. It was quickly settled by Sandy, who pointed out that Stephen must go of course, for only he had the means, by the aid of Don Antonio's credit, to purchase the arms; while Mick must also go perforce, to take care of Manuelita and restore her to her friends. "So there's naething else for it," sighed Sandy, "but I maun stop. Ay, but it'll be a weary time!"

Stephen, while admitting the force of the reasons adduced, scarcely liked to accept the Scotchman's generous self-sacrifice. Though he did not say so, he feared that it

might take a longer time than Sandy expected to carry out the transaction, since it might even be necessary for him to see Don Antonio in Paraguay in order to get the funds, and then the arms would have to be smuggled out of the Spanish settlements under great difficulties. Nevertheless, he saw no other way open out of their dangerous position. On the very next day, therefore, he, with Mick and Manuelita, started out on their journey to Santa Fé.

"Dinna be ower anxious aboot me," said Sandy, trying to keep up bravely. "There's no mony tae lament me if the scoondrels tak' it into their heads tae put an end tae me. Whereas you, Mick, an' you tae, Mr. Stephen, if I'm no mistaken," he said significantly, "have them that would greet sair if onything happened tae ye."

When he arrived at Santa Fé, Stephen found himself brought face to face with a new set of difficulties so formidable that he was almost driven to despair.

Though only about three months had elapsed since he had left Paraguay, events had moved so rapidly in that country as to completely transform its condition. From Corrientes had come down the news that Dr. Francia, as the result of carefully-planned intrigues, had succeeded in getting himself appointed to the head of the Government, and almost immediately afterwards persuaded the people to place the entire power absolutely in his hands, and to elect him "First Consul of the Paraguayan Republic" for life.

"'First Consul' indeed!" thought Stephen; "he is closely following the footsteps of his ideal, Napoleon, and we all know what that led to." As soon as the doctor had found himself securely in power, he had evidently decided to put in force that policy which he had advocated on the occasion Stephen and Don Antonio had visited him. He now issued decrees setting forth his intention of cutting Paraguay off from all the rest of the world, and no one was to be allowed to enter or leave the country without his

permission. Nor would any export or import trade be permitted unless by his special sanction.

This was a cruel blow to Stephen, for not only were his trading projects, from which he expected to derive a fortune, completely destroyed, but he would even be prevented from rejoining his dear friends, Don Antonio and Pepita, without whom life, he thought, was worth nothing. How, also, could he proceed to carry out his bargain with the Matacos, and rescue the devoted Sandy?

To add to his troubles, he found that the river was now dominated by a set of men known as the "marinos", mostly runaway sailors from the Spanish navy in those waters, who had taken advantage of the disorderly state of the times to become little else than pirates. Without their permission no one could go up or down the Paraná, or even cross into Entreríos on the route to Paraguay. And what about the *Tridente*? Stephen thought in alarm.

It happened, however, that a few days later the *Tridente* actually arrived in the port of Santa Fé. The captain told him that he had fortunately been able to evade the marinos so far, but that he would not dare to proceed farther on the voyage.

Appalled though he felt by these obstacles, Stephen resolved that he would not give way without a struggle. It happened that Don Antonio had given him the name of a house in Santa Fé to which he might appeal in his name if he found himself in straits. Stephen now went to find these people. To his delight, he found that not only were they disposed to render assistance to their friend, Señor Rodriguez, but that they were in a position to do so effectively. By the aid of private agents they opened negotiations with the commander of the marinos, and by paying a considerable fine they obtained permission for the *Tridente* to continue her voyage up the river. Stephen then gave instructions that she should not attempt to enter the port of Asuncion, but should make for a point on the

opposite bank, in front of the city, and there await his orders. The firm also advanced him a sum on Don Antonio's account, which Stephen declared to be necessary, but without specifying the object. With this he was able to purchase the arms and other articles necessary to carry out his treaty with the Matacos.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THROUGH THE GRAN CHACO

STEPHEN had now before him two important and difficult problems to resolve, and that without delay, and there was no possibility of retrieving his position should he come to a wrong decision.

He had first of all to contrive to convey the arms to the Indians against the severe prohibition of the existing laws, and he had next to decide how he could get into Paraguay in spite of the orders of the Dictator.

By all accounts, even if he succeeded in crossing the river by permission, or elusion, of the marinos, he would find Entrerios and Corrientes overrun by wandering bands of robbers, who might prevent his progress at any point, and even murder him and his party.

After long and careful consideration of the circumstances, he finally came to the conclusion that his best course would be to give out that he had resolved upon undertaking a trading journey to the interior provinces of Cordoba and San Juan. In view of this announcement, no suspicion would be aroused by his purchasing arms and ammunition in quantity amongst other goods, and mules upon which to load them.

By the aid of Mick, who had now placed Manuelita in charge of her friends, he was able to carry out this

business in a few days, and he had all the goods sent to the warehouses of Don Antonio's friends.

While among the Matacos, he had learned that they and their allied tribes held the entire territory on the western side of the Paraná River as far north as the Pilcomayo, which flows with the Paraguay River in front of Asuncion, so that he now decided that the best means of reaching Paraguay would be to keep on that side, as probably the Matacos would be able and willing to supply him with a guide. He did not conceal from himself the difficulties of the enterprise, which meant the traversing of the vast unexplored wilderness known as the "Gran Chaco", through which no passage was possible but with the good-will of the various tribes of Indians who claimed it as their own.

"Isn't it wonderful," he said to Mick, "how out of evil good often comes! If we had not had to rescue Manuelita, and so been led to make friends with the Matacos, what could we have done now?"

Stephen had the guns brought to the place where he was living, and there he and Mick carefully took the barrels and the stocks apart, and packed them at the bottom of wicker baskets suitable to load upon mules, the upper part of which was filled with harmless merchandise. He took care to acquire a quantity of goods with which to propitiate the Indians he would meet on his passage through the Gran Chaco. In a few days more they were able to make a start, and got away without molestation, as the authorities were informed that their destination was Cordoba. Nor were they stopped at the frontier, as the disorganized state of the country seemed to have relaxed the vigilance of the customs officers.

Once clear of the recognized Spanish territory, no further obstacles arose to prevent their journey to the *tolderias* of the Matacos. There they were received with great enthusiasm, especially by Sandy, who said to Stephen: "Man!

I sometimes was feart ye were never coming! Ah, but it's been a dreich wearisome time wi' me since ye left."

The guns were delivered to the cacique, also the knives and iron, and the Indians could scarcely contain their joy upon receiving them, especially as Stephen had brought even more than he had bargained for.

The grim face of the cacique relaxed, and he appeared to be in such a pleasant humour that Stephen thought it would be a good opportunity to ask him to assist him in carrying out his adventurous journey.

Instantly a change came over the countenance of the chief. "You know not what you ask," he said. "Never has a Christian been allowed to cross that territory. We Indians know too well what would probably be the result if the white men became acquainted with its richness. Besides, it is a long way; many, many days, and none of our people know all the way."

Here was another difficulty, and Stephen thanked his stars that he had had so much foresight as to provide himself with a sufficient quantity of such things as he knew were coveted by, and irresistible to, the Indians, to enable him to buy his way through. But it took a long time and much negotiation before he could satisfy the demands of the greedy chief, and of the wily interpreter, who had been chosen as the best guide.

Patience and perseverance, however, generally win in the end, and finally the three "Cristianos" were allowed to set out upon their long journey through the unknown wilds.

It is needless, even were it possible, to recount the many incidents and perilous adventures through which the party passed upon that protracted and hazardous expedition. But for the anxiety which Stephen constantly felt with regard to the safety of Don Antonio and Pepita, and the success of their commercial undertaking, he would have thoroughly enjoyed this voyage of exploration through lands which no white man had ever before seen. They traversed vast

tangled forests, the haunt of the jaguar, wading through leagues of marsh and palm swamp, but frequently also came upon fertile regions destined in time to be the site of prosperous civilized settlements, followed up by tracts of desert only passable at the cost of great hardships and dangers. A token which their guide bore from the cacique of the Matacos everywhere secured them friendly welcome from the Indians, while the presents Stephen was able to give assured them of hearty good-will and assistance. But these people place no value upon time, and were unable to understand why the "Cristianos" were so eager to press on, and it was frequently necessary to remain for days at a tolderia in order to appease them. It was more than two months after they left the tolderia of the Matacos that they rode, one afternoon, into an Indian village at the junction of the rivers Pilcomayo and Paraguay, whence, looking across the latter, they could see the lights of the city of Asuncion.

There was little beyond its topographical position to distinguish this village from the hundreds of Indian tolderias through which the party had passed on their way through the Gran Chaco. The proximity of a civilized country like Paraguay, only separated from it by a river a few hundred yards wide, appeared to have had no effect upon the barbarism of its inhabitants. They, however, extended to the travellers such hospitality as they could offer, which, if rough, was apparently well meant.

Having carried out the formalities customary upon arrival, the guide informed Stephen that he had learned from the cacique that a "Christian" was lying ill in one of the toldos, and would like to see them.

Stephen and his companions at once went to the hut pointed out to them. There they found, lying upon a pile of skins, an old man having the appearance of a priest, though so worn with sickness, unshaven and dishevelled, dirty and ragged, that it was difficult to discern through the smoky atmosphere of the hut that he could possibly be of

European race. Great was their astonishment to find, after exchanging a few words, that he was none other than the venerable Father Anselmo, whom they had met a few months before when on their tour through the district of the old Jesuit missions. With almost equal surprise, though too weak for emotion, the aged priest recognized his former visitors.

"Ah, my friends!" he exclaimed in a mournful tone, "the hand of God has fallen heavily upon me and upon my country. His will be done! But, oh, that terrible man!" His words greatly alarmed Stephen, who had long felt that affairs in Paraguay could not be going well under the unchecked sway of such a man as Dr. Francia. Nevertheless he curbed his impatience, and did all in his power to render more comfortable the condition of the invalid. Cheered as much by the presence of Europeans as by their attentions, Father Anselmo recovered sufficiently to be able to give them an account of the principal events which had happened since they left Paraguay.

They had already heard how Dr. Francia had succeeded, apparently in a constitutional manner, in getting himself elected as the head of the Government, and shortly afterwards appointed First Consul for life with absolute power. Very soon, Father Anselmo told them, he began to make use of this power in an arbitrary and extraordinary manner, such as his poor deluded countrymen, who had placed it in his hands, could never have imagined or dreamt of. Those who dared to remonstrate with him had met with such treatment as to serve all others with a terrorizing warning not to interfere. Men did not now venture to criticise the Dictator's conduct, even to members of their families and in the privacy of their homes; for this awful man, who really appeared to be a magician, seemed to hear every word that was spoken, and even to divine unspoken thoughts. His vengeance was swift and implacable, without possibility of escape for the victim, for the arm of his power

was very long. Already he had remorselessly sent many of the strongest of his foes to the scaffold. He had shut off the country from all intercourse with those outside. No one could now enter or leave it without his permission. People were not allowed to be out of their houses after dark, except by his authority. "He has gone further," almost shrieked the priest; "he has dared to lay his hands upon the Lord's anointed, he has closed all the churches, and expelled the clergy from the country. That is why I am here, left stranded, too weak to follow my unfortunate brethren—I, who was living so peaceful a life, so far remote that one would have thought my existence was quite unknown."

Stephen was in agony to learn the fate of his friends Don Antonio and Pepita, but Father Anselmo was too excited to give heed to his enquiries.

"The tyrant," he continued, "has surrounded himself with men scarcely less wicked than their master, fitting instruments to carry out his villainous designs. Chief amongst them are that execrable wretch, the late governor of my province, Don Ignacio Lopez, whom he has made his minister, and Captain Rugerio, a military adventurer from no one knows where."

At length Stephen managed to get the old man to attend to his repeated questions.

From the priest's disjointed answers he learned the position of his friends to be as follows:—

Señor Rodriguez was, of course, far too influential a man for the Dictator to leave alone, so he had been notified to keep in his country house and consider himself as under arrest within the bounds of his property. So far he had not been otherwise molested, and it was thought that the First Consul would not readily take further steps against him unless Don Antonio by some action gave him a pretext, which he was far too prudent a man to do.

"But what have I been thinking of!" suddenly exclaimed

Father Anselmo. "Here is something which was put into my hands just before I left, which may tell you more than I can." So saying, he brought from the folds of his soutane a crumpled piece of paper.

Stephen seized it eagerly, and at once, though it bore no signature, recognized the writing of Don Antonio.

It was but a brief note, cautiously worded, saying that as he, Don Antonio, had learned of the intended journey of Father Anselmo to Corrientes he had made use of this means of communication to warn Stephen, if it should reach him, not to endeavour to return to Paraguay for the present, as it would only complicate matters and might increase the danger in which the writer realized that he stood. He therefore requested him to wait at Corrientes with the schooner, where he hoped to be able to rejoin him soon. In any case, he believed that he could always inform him how matters were going in Paraguay through certain agents he had in that city. While relieved from his most serious apprehensions, Stephen felt exceedingly reluctant to go back when he had got so near to his goal; but he recognized the wisdom of Don Antonio's advice, and felt that he had no option but to obey.

After a few days' careful nursing Father Anselmo was sufficiently recovered to undertake a journey by easy stages, and the whole party set out by a route along the right bank of the Paraguay.

After a tedious journey they reached a point opposite Corrientes. There they found but little difficulty in being ferried across to the town.

To his delight Stephen learned that the *Tridente* had arrived in the port only a few days previously. She had made a very lengthy passage owing to adverse winds, and by taking the precaution of working up only by night, which the captain thought necessary to avoid attack or capture by the numerous piratical craft reported to be on the river.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE JESUITS' TREASURE

THERE was nothing now to be done but to wait at Corrientes until the arrival of the promised communication from Don Antonio. It was a weary life, this stagnation, after the excitement of the previous months, and as day after day dragged monotonously by, bringing no tidings, the constant anxiety with regard to the safety of his friends and the enforced inaction preyed seriously upon Stephen's spirits.

One evening while he was strolling along the river bank with Father Anselmo, and after a prolonged pause in which each seemed busy with his own thoughts, the old priest suddenly said: "I see, my son, that this standing still is wearing you out; it is but natural to youth, we old men have learned how to wait. Now I have been thinking of something we might do, which, if carried out successfully, would bring us a great reward; but it will be a difficult and perhaps a dangerous task." Stephen was instantly aroused to attention, and eagerly questioned his friend for further particulars.

But the old man was not to be hurried, and Stephen had to curb his impatience until they had found a retired spot where they could talk without fear of being overheard.

"I believe I can trust you," at length said Father Anselmo, "and that I can rely upon your carrying out any conditions I may impose; or, if you find them unacceptable, that you will at least respect my confidence."

Stephen readily expressed acquiescence.

"And now, what I have to say," resumed the priest, "is that I know where there is a great treasure concealed, and that it might be possible to bring it away. But it will need brave hearts and strong arms."

"And these, Father," cried Stephen, "you have at your disposal, for I presume you will want my companions' aid as well as mine."

"Yes," replied the old man, "we shall need their services if we decide upon the undertaking; and now let me explain. Do you remember an allusion to treasure I made when I first met you?"

Stephen remembered it well, and said that he had often since wondered what it meant.

Father Anselmo then went on to relate how, when the Jesuits had been expelled from Paraguay without an hour's warning about forty-five years previously, they had, of course, to leave behind the great property they had amassed. Much of this consisted of lands and cattle; but in the churches and in the monasteries there was also an accumulation of enormous wealth in the form of gold, silver, and jewels. The guards who had been sent to effect the expulsion had been too busy in the first few hours looking after their prisoners to think of anything else. Meanwhile a few devoted friends of the order, like himself (then a secular priest), had quietly collected such valuables and concealed them in a safe place until the Jesuits should return, which they then thought would be soon.

"Alas!" said the old man, "our hopes were disappointed; but I have always regarded these treasures as held in trust for their rightful owners, and even now I will not be a party to recovering them unless it is agreed that at least one-half of their value be restored to the Holy Order of Jesus."

Stephen readily accepted this stipulation, which he told the venerable priest did him honour. He then enquired what value the treasure he spoke of might have.

"It is difficult to tell," said Father Anselmo, "but I should say that it would be worth at the very least some two hundred thousand gold dollars (£40,000).

Stephen, upon hearing of such a prize, was naturally very

much excited, and he eagerly plied Father Anselmo with questions as to what would have to be done to secure it. The old priest, still very cautious from long habit, gradually informed him that the treasure was buried at a spot not far from the ruined church where they had first met. To reach it they must take a boat up the Alto Paraná, which joined the Paraguay River near the place where they were. The journey upwards might take about four days and the return about three, while the recovery of the treasure might occupy two days more.

Stephen at once urged Father Anselmo to authorize him to undertake the expedition. But as he spoke, the thought suddenly occurred to him, "What if a message from Don Antonio should arrive while we are gone?" and his heart fell, for not even for the sake of so great a gain could he abandon his duty to his friend.

He explained this thought to the father, who quite saw the force of it, and remarked resignedly: "My son, we must be guided by Providence. If God wills us to go, the way will be opened."

It seemed as if the venerable priest's words were prophetic, for next day Stephen heard from Don Antonio's agents that they had just received a message by some mysterious means announcing that he had decided to attempt to leave Paraguay with his daughter, and that he would not take the direct way from Asuncion down the river, as that was too well watched, but would come by a circuitous route to the opposite bank of the Alto Paraná, and cross to Corrientes. It would be some weeks at least before he could start, even if all went well.

After several consultations, in which the two sailors were taken into their confidence, it was finally decided that the attempt should be made. It was arranged that of whatever treasure was recovered the representatives of the Jesuits at Buenos Ayres were to receive one-half; of the remainder, Stephen was to take one-half, and Sandy and

Mick one-quarter each. Father Anselmo claimed nothing for himself, being content, he said, to rely upon what the Jesuits would give him as a reward.

Instead of going up in a canoe, as Father Anselmo had originally proposed, Stephen, as representative of Don Antonio, obtained the use of the *Tridente*'s roomy boat, which was provided with a mast and sails, and was of sufficient capacity to carry down the heavy load of treasure, should they find it. It was well provisioned for the journey, and spades and picks were easily procured in Corrientes.

It was given out that the Englishmen had offered to accompany Father Anselmo to his former home to bring away some little property of his, which he had not had time to remove when the priests were expelled by Dr. Francia; so no undue curiosity was awakened.

On the evening of the fourth day of the voyage Father Anselmo at length intimated that they had reached the spot where they must leave their boat. They therefore moored to a tree for the night.

Their progress, when they landed next morning, was terribly hindered for the first few hundred yards by the difficulty of forcing their way through a thick jungle of undergrowth, the branches of which, many of them armed with sharp spines, were so interlaced that a passage could only be made by the use of cutlasses, and at a cost of lacerated flesh and torn clothes. At length they emerged into a more open forest, and finally reached land which looked like a carefully-laid-out park.

The party could scarcely help pausing to admire the beauty of the scene. Father Anselmo was especially affected, as he was gazing again upon a place which called up many old associations. Thoroughly familiar with the locality, he led them without hesitation towards the village which had been for many years the field of his devoted labours.

A piteous sight met their eyes when they arrived. Of

the huts where his simple flock had lived so happily there remained but a few blackened embers, and even the ancient church had not been spared. The charred beams of its roof had fallen in disordered piles across its floor. The old man could not restrain his tears. "Alas, my children!" he cried; "what has been your fate?"

The whole place was completely deserted, and looked a picture of desolation.

Presently Father Anselmo explained that what had happened would add greatly to the difficulty of their task. The treasure had been buried beneath the floor of the church in a vault which had been prepared for such eventualities, the entrance to which had been carefully concealed, and was only discoverable by those who held the clue to the secret. A flag-stone had to be raised at a point where formerly the shadow of the head of a saint's statue standing in one of the windows was projected on the floor when the sun had risen to a certain height, but now the floor was encumbered and the image was gone.

The first step was to clear a space on what had been the floor as near what had been the site of the vault as the priest could remember. To this work they applied themselves at once, but it was so toilsome and difficult, as well as dangerous on account of the numerous scorpions and venomous insects which had made their haunts in the fallen debris, that but slow progress was made. The evening shadows warned them that they would have to camp there for the night. In such a climate this was no great hardship, especially to seasoned campaigners, and even the aged Father Anselmo seemed to bear up with renewed vigour. Soon, however, they realized that there were unexpected dangers. The place, since it had been deserted by its inhabitants, appeared to have been made a special resort by wild beasts, and almost as soon as the darkness set in it became alive with their cries. All night long the jaguars prowled round with their angry snarls,

threatening at any moment to spring upon one of the party. It was only by keeping up a great fire and occasionally tossing lighted brands into the trees that they could obtain some sense of security.

As early as daylight permitted, the work was resumed, and carried on with such vigour that soon Father Anselmo told them they had cleared away enough for his purpose. They had been encouraged by finding that a considerable area of the tiled floor still remained intact. The priest asked them to sweep it carefully with boughs. This being done, he entered upon his search after first kneeling down and making obeisance towards the place where the grand altar had once stood. He carefully examined the flags, traversing them row after row, and at length he exclaimed excitedly, "Praise to our Lady, I have found the spot!"

He then related that he had often prayed over the site of the buried treasure for the return of the Jesuits, and in these hours of devotion he had almost unconsciously noted certain minute peculiarities of the flags, amongst them a crack which appeared in his fancy to outline the head of a saint, and this he now recognized. A few strokes of a pick soon revealed the fact that the venerable priest was not mistaken; for when the flags were raised, an iron ring, lying flat, was disclosed, which Father Anselmo declared to be attached to the trap-door of the vault. A vigorous push upon the end of a pole thrust through the ring proved that his assertion was correct, for the trap was raised and the opening was displayed.

Stephen at once leapt into the vault, involuntarily recalling his old adventure in the smuggler's cave near Bristol. He found it stored with strong wooden chests set upon stone shelves round the walls. Their weight, when he tried to move them, seemed to prove that Father Anselmo's story was no myth.

By the aid of the sailors, and the use of levers and picks as wedges, they were soon able to force open the lid of

some of the chests, and were enchanted to find them full of bags of money and jewels; whilst a large number of solid silver pillars, which had at one time formed the balustrade in front of the grand altar, stood in one corner.

But, having discovered the treasure, the tantalizing thought arose, "How is it to be taken away?" There was apparently no help for transporting such a load to be obtained in the neighbourhood, and even if they decided to carry it down to the boat on their shoulders, it would take them weeks to accomplish the task. Meanwhile there would be the risk of discovery by the ubiquitous myrmidons of the Dictator.

While they were debating this perplexing problem, they were startled by the sudden appearance of an Indian, who had stolen upon them silently and unperceived. Upon recognizing Father Anselmo, however, he had at once left his concealment and thrown himself at the priest's feet, where he knelt with many demonstrations of reverence and affection. The venerable pastor showed that he was no less delighted with the meeting. He conversed with his humble friend for a long time in the Indian dialect. At length, turning to the young men, he exclaimed: "This is indeed a providential deliverance out of our difficulty. This man was formerly one of my flock, and he tells me that his tribe, all of whom are devoted to me, are encamped in the woods but a short distance away. I have asked him to bring them to our aid. These people are accustomed to bear heavy loads for long distances through the woods, and as there is a large number of them, by dividing up the treasure into small parcels we may soon be able to transport it to the river. These Indians are as honest as the day, and I question if they will be able to form any idea of the value of the things we shall confide to their care. At any rate it will be enough for them to know that they are doing me a service."

In about an hour the Indian returned accompanied by

his friends. There were about a hundred of them, men and women, all of whom saluted Father Anselmo joyously but reverently.

Stephen and his men had in the meantime been busy making up the treasure into small parcels, each of which could easily be carried on the head of an Indian. Mick was sent off with the first party to guide them to the boat, and he remained there to stow the precious freight. All the afternoon the Indians kept coming and going like a stream of ants, and by the evening the treasure-seekers had the satisfaction of accompanying the last party of willing porters, and of seeing the whole treasure embarked.

Father Anselmo gave the helpful Indians his blessing, and parted from them with much regret.

During the next two days, as they rapidly sailed down the river with favourable wind and current, the question was seriously debated as to what they should do to secure the treasure until the time came when they could carry it down safely to Buenos Ayres. Finally it was decided to bury it on the southern bank of the river at some secluded spot within easy reach of Corrientes. And this they did without interruption, in a little creek which they could easily recognize when, as they hoped, they would return with the schooner.

CHAPTER XL

TERRIBLE NEWS

STEPHEN was happier than he had been for months when, after having concealed their precious freight, the boat was gently drifting onwards towards Corrientes. His first thought was that now, even though his hopes of success from the trading venture had been dashed to the ground by the unexpected change of affairs in Paraguay,

he had at last secured for himself a fortune which would place him in no unfitting position to aspire to the hand of Pepita, and he looked forward with eager anticipation to meeting her and Don Antonio within a very short time, safe beyond the power of the terrible Dictator of Paraguay.

His companions had also every reason to be satisfied with the result of the expedition, and it was in the most cheerful frame of mind that they talked of their prospects and what they would do with their money.

They had just rounded a bend of the river when they observed a canoe approaching them, urged on with all the force of the strong Indian paddlers, and they soon understood from the signals, which a man in the stern was making, that they wished to communicate with them. In a few seconds the canoe was alongside, and the steersman handed to Stephen a letter, which he said he had been asked by Don Antonio's agents in Corrientes to deliver without delay. Stephen tore it open with feverish haste. It contained terrible news. A message had reached the agents that Señor Rodriguez and his daughter had, while on their way southwards, been captured by Dr. Francia's troops, and that Don Antonio was now a prisoner in Asuncion, while Pepita had been allowed to go to some friends in the town.

It was feared that the Dictator might any day wreak his vengeance upon Don Antonio by putting him to death, as he had already done with so many whom he considered his rivals or opponents.

This news threw Stephen and his companions into a fever of anxiety. They decided that they must go to the rescue of their friends as quickly as possible. The oars were at once thrown out, and the boat urged on at highest speed to Corrientes. Arrived there, Stephen immediately gave orders for the *Tridente* to get ready to sail up the Paraguay, for he felt that she would be needed to bring back his friends should he succeed in rescuing them.

The captain was ordered to make for the Indian village opposite Asuncion where they had found Father Anselmo. The aged priest insisted upon going up with the schooner, as he felt that he must help if he could. Without delay Stephen and his companions crossed the River Paraguay, taking their riding-gear only; they knew from past experience that they could get plenty of horses from the Chaco Indians.

On through the Chaco they pursued their way, taking but little rest upon the journey, until, within what would have appeared to them in other circumstances an incredibly short time, they arrived at last at the tolderia in front of Asuncion.

But even then Stephen felt that he could not rest. Constantly there was before him the thought of Don Antonio a prisoner, likely to be put to death at any moment, and Pepita, driven from her happy home, in constant suspense and misery. Oh, he must go to them at once!

But how? But how?

Between him and Asuncion lay the swift-flowing river, too broad for the strongest swimmer to cross, even if he escaped the *jacarés* (alligators) and the *palometas*, fierce shark-like fishes, which would soon drag down any man who ventured into the water. Could a boat be found?

Through enquiries he soon learned that an Indian living not far off owned a *piroga* or canoe, and at once Stephen and his party went in search of this man, whom they found without difficulty, and who readily agreed to let out the frail craft for as long as was desired, in exchange for a knife.

The canoe was only a tree-trunk hollowed out, and scarcely capable of carrying one person. It was easy to see that great skill would be required to manage it, and to avoid being upset, especially in such a swift current.

Sandy and Mick earnestly begged Stephen not to attempt such a risky passage, but he would not listen to them.

He had only the one thought—Pepita and her father were in peril, and he must go to them.

He asked his companions to go back to the Indian village, and promised to return in three days if possible. They were also to ride down the river daily, and keep a good look-out for the *Tridente*, which ought now to be not far away. Should she arrive, they were to keep her there until he returned.

CHAPTER XLI

FOLLOWING the advice of the Indian boatman, Stephen paddled slowly up the river, keeping close into the continuous fringe of reeds and bamboos on the near side, until he appeared to be a mile or so above the town. As his friends had anticipated, he found that it was only with the greatest care that he could manage the paddle and keep the canoe from overturning. It was a trying position; darkness was coming on, and not a soul was in sight. Frequently he was startled by the plunge of a *carpincho* (water-hog) into the river, or by the snort of a great unwieldly tapir swimming close by. From some mud-banks the horrid, black, scaly forms of three or four *jacarés* (alligators) slowly slid off as he approached. As the darkness increased, the cries of the denizens of the neighbouring forest, the snarl of the jaguar, the shriek of the peccary, and the hoarse growl of the puma, arose, adding to the eeriness of his position. A cloud of mosquitoes and other stinging insects continually surrounded him, driving him nearly mad.

At length he determined to attempt the crossing, and, nerving himself for the great effort, he made for the opposite shore. To his satisfaction he found that the

water, though swift-running, was unbroken, and his preliminary up-river stretch had taught him how to manage the boat. He struck out, therefore, with more confidence, and was soon pleased to see that he would probably be able to get across without accident. He began to consider where he would land. All the usual landing-places, he knew, from Father Anselmo's account, were watched constantly by the Dictator's sentries. To attempt to go on shore at them would mean immediate arrest.

Finally he decided to land, if possible, upon a little point which he could just discern upon the shore. From his previous acquaintance with Asuncion, he knew that this was the site of the Panteon (cemetery), a place shunned at night by the natives with superstitious dread, where even the power of the Dictator would scarcely be sufficient to induce them to remain. By skill and good fortune he was able to carry out this design, and having reached the shore, he carefully concealed the canoe among the rushes. As he expected, he found the Panteon solitary and unwatched, left to the solemnity of its silent occupants. A death-like shudder passed through him as he made his way among the clustered crosses, and realized the risk and difficulty of his mission.

Not a person did he meet as he cautiously made his way into the town. He was oppressed with the dreadful stillness of the place, so different from the state of the town upon his previous visit. No longer were the sound of cheerful voices, the tinkling of the guitar, and the lively song heard from each house. All was mute as the grave. But for his knowledge of the cause, the Dictator's dread decree, he would have believed it to be a city of the dead.

But how was he to find Pepita? There was no one in the street he could ask, and every door was shut, while the occupants were probably shrinking behind them, too timorous to respond to a summons.

Keeping in the shadow of the trees by the roadside lest any lurking spies of the tyrant might observe him, he wandered about in perplexity. Suddenly an owl hooted overhead.

Like a flash there flew through his brain the thought that he had found a means whereby he might discover Pepita.

Slowly advancing along the rear of the houses, he from time to time gave utterance to the hooting cry "Pep-eet-ta! Pep-eet-ta!" like some night owl, just as he and Don Antonio used to do on the ship, trembling the while with anxiety. For a time there was no response, but presently he fancied he saw a curtain being drawn aside in a window. Cautiously he approached the house, and once more uttered the signal.

This time there could be no mistake; evidently someone was watching, and immediately he heard a voice call out in low, nervous tones: "Who is there?"

Quickly he responded. "It is I—Stephen. Is it you, Pepita?"

The reply, "Ay, Dios Mio! Thanks, Blessed Virgin!" assured him that he had in reality found the object of his anxious quest.

Soon he heard the bolts of the door withdrawn, and with infinite caution it was opened, and he crept into the house in darkness. A candle was now lit, and with rapture he found himself once more in the presence of the loved one, whose image was always before his mental vision.

Yes it was Pepita, but not the Pepita he had left behind him a few short months ago. No longer the bright joyous countenance, careless and happy, but a woman upon whose brow mantled a cloud of care. Her face was drawn and pale, and her demeanour sad and troubled. Yet for a moment as she welcomed him there flashed over her features that same old look that he remembered so well—

a flush of joy as she involuntarily uttered the words: "Oh, my darling! my love! God has sent you to deliver us."

In other circumstances these words, that look, would have sent Stephen into a delirium of joy, and for long afterwards he treasured the remembrance of that welcome, for was it not an acknowledgment that the ardent passion he had so long silently cherished was returned.

The light was carefully screened to prevent it from being seen from outside, and the lovers proceeded to recount to each other their story. Stephen had already heard of Don Antonio's terrible position, but he now learned from Pepita something which added to its horrors. She told him that ever since her poor father had been cast into prison she had been persecuted by the villainous Don Ignacio Lopez, who had never forgotten the passion she had roused in his breast when they were fellow-passengers on *La Purisima Concepcion*. Feeling a great abhorrence for this man, she had not hesitated to repel his advances, or to conceal from him her dislike and disdain. But, foiled in his direct approaches, he now sought to accomplish his ends by other means, which were quite in keeping with his odious character. He had brutally intimated to the girl that unless she accepted him as a suitor, and consented to marry him within a month, he would use his influence with Dr. Francia to have her father put to death. Everyone knew only too well that Lopez's influence with the Dictator was all-powerful, so that this was no empty threat.

No marvel was it that Pepita had been driven to utter despair, and had welcomed Stephen as a heaven-sent deliverer.

Far into the night did the lovers discuss their plans for effecting Don Antonio's deliverance, until Stephen at last persuaded Pepita to retire to rest, while he himself sank into a hammock, utterly worn out with the fatigues and anxieties of the day.

CHAPTER XLII

A VISIT TO THE PRISON. A KNOTTY PROBLEM

THE friends with whom Pepita had taken shelter, to whom Stephen was duly presented next morning, were an elderly man, Don Rufino Gomez, a very old acquaintance of Don Antonio, who was a widower, and his maiden sister Doña Prudencia, and, as Pepita explained, they were thoroughly to be relied upon. Their greatest wish was first to secure the release of Don Antonio, and then to escape from the country, away from the odious tyranny of Francia.

By their aid Stephen was provided with a costume like that worn by the Paraguayan peasantry, and when he had donned this and dyed his complexion somewhat darker, he felt comparatively secure in setting out to reconnoitre the surroundings of the place of Don Antonio's captivity.

The building which had been converted by Dr. Francia into a state prison had formerly been a villa belonging to some prosperous resident. It stood within its own grounds a little way out of the town, and was surrounded by an open space which had been the garden of its owner.

Stephen observed, with a somewhat despairing heart, that the Dictator apparently relied for the security of his prisoners more upon the vigilance of his sentries, who were constantly upon guard on every side, than upon the strength of the walls, or bolts and bars.

He did not, however, venture to make too close an inspection, for to have approached the building without some ostensible purpose would certainly have exposed him to suspicion and possibly to arrest. He noticed, however, that several itinerant vendors of provisions and fruit were allowed to approach the house and to hold converse with

the prisoners through the grated windows. Apparently those confined had to provide for themselves.

This gave him an idea, upon which he was not slow to act. He at once procured a basket of fruit, and in the centre of a melon he concealed a note to Don Antonio announcing his presence, and holding forth a hope of a speedy release.

The note he wrote in English, feeling confident that no one in Paraguay but Don Antonio was likely to be able to decipher it, even if it fell into the hands of the authorities.

Slouching his broad hat over his features he made for the prison. All went as well as he could have desired. The clamour of the fruit-vendors brought every prisoner to the window, for even if they had not the means wherewith to buy, the scene was at least a brief relief to their monotonous captivity.

With difficulty did Stephen restrain a gesture which might have betrayed him, when he first caught sight of his old friend. So great had been the effects of confinement and anxiety upon him that he appeared to have aged by at least ten years within the six months which had passed since they had separated. He had a long white beard, and his face was furrowed with deep wrinkles. Instead of the alert, active manner, so well remembered by Stephen, Don Antonio now crossed his narrow chamber with the dragging steps of a feeble old man. Stephen saw that his hand shook, as if with palsy, as he grasped the window bars.

Don Antonio's attention was quickly directed to Stephen, as he alone, amongst the hawkers, spoke Spanish; the others in offering their wares shouted in the Guarani language.

After purchasing a few oranges, Don Antonio was about to retire when Stephen pressed him to accept a melon. "No charge, patron," said he; "I give it you as a 'Llapa' (gift thrown in), as I am new here, and you are my first customer." When Stephen returned next day to his post

as a hawker, he was greatly pleased to see from the glance of Don Antonio's eye that he had recognized him, and that he appeared to be more cheerful. No audible communication, however, could take place between them in the presence of the ever-vigilant sentries.

While hawking his fruit, Stephen had kept his eyes open, so as to observe the possibility of rescuing Don Antonio. He soon realized that it was no easy problem he had to solve. As has been explained, the building stood a considerable distance back from the road, and was surrounded by open ground in which sentries continually patrolled.

Stephen's first idea had been to make a subterranean passage from some spot outside the enclosure to come underneath the floor of the room in which Don Antonio was confined. He soon abandoned this scheme as impracticable. The ground upon which Asuncion stands is composed of a deep bed of loose sand, under which is rock. No tunnel could be made through the upper stratum without timbering to support the earth, nor through the lower without blasting. He had not the appliances for either of these methods, nor would there have been sufficient time to excavate such a passage.

To get the prisoner out through the window would be equally impracticable. Even if he could have sawn through the massive iron bars which guarded it, the vigilance of the sentries would have prevented any such attempt.

Finally, he came to consider the possibilities of evasion through the roof. As in most other buildings in that country, the villa had a flat tiled roof, surrounded by a parapet about breast-high. Through the window of the room occupied by Don Antonio, Stephen observed that a wooden stair led from the floor to a trap-door giving access to the *azotea* (flat roof), which is a favourite resort in the cool of the evening in such climates. Stephen concluded, however, that this trap-door must now be strongly barred.

And then he thought that even if it were not, or if he could force it open, he would not be much further advanced towards his purpose, for no one could drop from the roof without attracting the attention of the sentries and being at once recaptured. Besides, he saw that Don Antonio was now too infirm to attempt any such feat, or to be able to run away even if by some means he had been got out of the building.

Stephen was almost in despair when his eye lighted upon a splendid sycamore-tree which stood behind the wall of the adjoining garden, so close that some of its branches overhung the grounds in which stood the prison.

Upon returning to Pepita and talking the matter over, he learned that the villa in the garden of which the tree stood was occupied by friends of Don Rufino, who could be relied upon to assist the escape of Don Antonio in any way which did not involve risk to themselves. It was easy, therefore, for Stephen to obtain permission to enter the garden, which he did, unobserved, just before dark, in order to make a reconnaissance of the prison and study the problem more carefully. The sycamore he had seen to be large and wide-spreading, and when he came to climb it he found it even better developed than he had expected. The main trunk, over three feet in diameter, rose to a considerably greater height than the roof of the jail, and then threw out several sturdy limbs, which again subdivided into innumerable branches, carrying over all a thick canopy of foliage, sufficient to hide from observers anybody in the tree on the other side of the wall. But the longest of the overhanging branches was separated from the roof of the prison by a space of not less, Stephen calculated, than about thirteen or fourteen feet. A rope flung from any fork sufficiently strong to bear the weight of a man would fall perpendicularly about eight or ten feet outside the wall of the building.

Stephen observed from the high station to which he had

crept that the trap-door on the roof was, as he had anticipated, fixed down by two strong iron bars passing through staples outside. It would be scarcely possible to force it open from within.

It was with despair at his heart that he returned to the house of Don Rufino, but he would not confess this to Pepita, though he lay most of the night in his hammock sleepless, searching in his mind to contrive some means of overcoming the obstacles which lay between Don Antonio and freedom.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE PLAN OF ESCAPE

NEXT morning Stephen awoke with a start. An idea as to how he might release Don Antonio had come to him like an inspiration in a dream. The more he thought of it the clearer he saw that the plan might possibly succeed, though doubtless it would be attended with great risk. But to carry it out he would need to have the co-operation of his sailor friends, and also assistance from the *Tridente*. He now remembered his promise to return to the Indian village on the opposite side of the river in three days, and he resolved to make an immediate start.

Having informed Pepita and her friends of his intentions, and intimated that he believed he had a plan to save Don Antonio, he started upon his perilous journey.

Knowing that every point was watched, he proceeded with great caution, taking a roundabout route to the point where he had landed. There he found the canoe safe as he had left it. He then paddled up-stream for a long distance, keeping within the shade of the belt of reeds, and finally struck boldly across the river and allowed the boat to drift down to the landing-place near the Indian village.

Mick and Sandy were overjoyed to see him again, having passed the time during which he was absent in great anxiety. From an Indian who had been sent down the river, Stephen learned that the *Tridente* had been seen some miles below, but that she would probably take about three days more to reach the village, as she had to warp her way up against the current.

Stephen then related to Mick and Sandy the position of affairs in Asuncion, and proceeded to explain to them his plans to effect Don Antonio's rescue from the prison. His first idea had been to rig up in the sycamore-tree a long pole, like the derrick of a crane, from which a tackle could be swung down to or near the roof of the prison. By this means he could get upon the azotea and withdraw the bolts holding down the trap-door, then bring Don Antonio up, put him in a strop, or "boatswain's chair", attached to the tackle, hoist him to the derrick, swing it round, and lower him into the adjacent garden.

Provided this could be done silently, and the sentries did not look up (he had noticed that they generally marched with their eyes on the ground), there was just a chance that the manœuvre might be carried out successfully. By the same means Stephen could also return to the tree. But the risk was terrible, for while suspended in mid-air he or Don Antonio would offer an easy target for the sentries' bullets.

Nevertheless, he could think of no better way, nor could the sailors suggest any other. They therefore resolved to make the attempt. A practical difficulty of importance at once presented itself. Where were they to obtain the pole for the derrick—or, if they had it, how could they convey it to the tree and rig it up without being detected?

There were no pine-trees in the neighbourhood, and such timber of suitable size as could be cut was as hard and as heavy as iron, too dense to float, too cumbrous to take across in a boat, or to carry through the streets of the town without attracting attention.

"Necessity is the mother of invention", and in his perplexity a brilliant idea came to Stephen. He instructed Sandy and Mick to get some bamboos, of which there was an abundance close at hand, to cut them into lengths of about three feet, with a thickness of about two or two and a half inches, to split them, to take out the pith, and to bore holes in the middle and at the extremity of each piece, for which purpose a red-hot ramrod would answer admirably. They were then to cut some hard-wood pins and drive them through the holes in the middle of two pieces of bamboo, so as to make a series of St. Andrew's crosses. These crosses were again to be connected by pins at their extremities. A splinter of bamboo in each pin on opposite sides would prevent the pin from falling out. Stephen pointed out that the result of this construction would be to make a contrivance somewhat like what is styled "lazy tongs". By bringing together the two ends of the last cross of the series, the whole combination would elongate, say to a length of about twenty feet, if they put in seven crosses, while by pushing the arms of the end cross apart the whole apparatus would shut up into a size of about three feet long by two feet wide, and only about two inches thick. In that form it would be easy to transport it across the river, and, when covered by a poncho, through the town in comparative security.

One such appliance would scarcely give sufficient resistance to serve as a derrick in the manner they proposed, therefore they would have to make two. The mode of working them would be to have a long thong of hide running through the holes in the ends of the last cross, by means of which they could bring them together, or allow them to separate as much as they desired. Having conveyed them to the tree and hoisted them up, they would step the two derricks on two branches some distance apart, so as to make the base of a triangle, of which the derricks formed the sides. The two outer ends of the derricks

would be lashed together, a long tackle attached to them, a rope for a stay would be carried from their outer ends and made fast high up in the tree. When all was ready, the derricks would be pushed out and the rest of the operation would be carried out as Stephen had proposed.

The practicability of the apparatus was admitted by the two men, who as sailors would be well able to work it, but it was seen that it would be necessary to await the arrival of the *Tridente* in order to obtain the ropes and tackle necessary. Meantime they could be preparing the bamboo derricks.

Before he left for Asuncion that evening Stephen had thought out the whole plan, and carefully instructed the sailors how to act. When the schooner had arrived and they had all their tackle ready, they were to make a fire upon the point opposite the village. Stephen undertook to keep a look-out for this signal from the cemetery, to which he would repair every night after dark. When he had seen the beacon he would understand that the attempt was to be made on the following night.

The sailors were to get the captain of the *Tridente* to lend them his boat, which would be large and roomy, as these schooners generally use their boats to load hides, and would therefore be able to accommodate the large party he meant to bring back. The boat would make for the cemetery point, where the two sailors would land, leaving someone behind to take charge. If by any accident Stephen was not there to meet them, they were to make their way to the house of Don Rufino, the description and locality of which Stephen carefully gave, and there they would receive directions, and probably a guide to the scene of operations.

Stephen was fortunately able to effect his return to Asuncion that night in safety.

CHAPTER XLIV

CAPTAIN RUGERIO

NEXT morning Stephen wrote out a full description of the proposed plan of rescue in English, and after having fully explained it to Pepita, he managed to transmit it without detection to Don Antonio's hands by the same means as he had previously employed. He added that he would give him a certain signal upon the morning of the day when the attempt was to be made.

Pepita, while admiring the boldness and ingenuity of the plan, could not help seeing that it was exceedingly risky, and she spent the next few days in a terrible state of anxiety and suspense. She did not, however, try to dissuade Stephen from making the attempt. Every indication now tended to show that the Dictator had fully decided to exterminate all his opponents. Almost daily prisoners were taken from the jail to be executed, and it was scarcely likely that Don Antonio would be long spared, especially when the malignant influence of Señor Lopez was at work.

Every evening, as had been arranged, Stephen stole down to the dark cemetery, there to watch for the promised signal.

It was not, however, until the fourth night that he at length saw the light blaze up from the opposite shore.

Next morning he was again at the prison, and managed once more to transmit a note to Don Antonio, which contained simply the words: "It is for to-morrow".

His task done, he was returning as usual to the house of Don Rufino, where Pepita was waiting for him anxiously. As he slouched along the road with his basket on arm, keeping up his character of fruit-hawker as well as possible, it suddenly occurred to him, he could scarce say

why, that he was being followed. Anxious to make sure if this were the case, he adopted several plans, such as suddenly doubling back on his track, moving quickly on and then almost stopping and taking a roundabout course. But though he could never see anything which actually proved that he was being watched, he could not throw off the idea that some invisible person was shadowing him.

At length, however, he came to the conclusion that this must be only a morbid fancy. He decided to go to the house, as he felt he ought not to keep Pepita longer in suspense.

Just as he reached the door four soldiers sprang out from behind a wall, and seized him by the arms before he had time to realize what had happened, or take any measures for escape or defence.

Stephen felt as if his last hour had come, and what instantly rose in his mind was that his plot had been discovered, and Don Antonio's escape would thereby be frustrated. This gave him more trouble than the mere alarm with regard to his personal safety.

At this moment an officer in gorgeous uniform came up, evidently the commander of the guard, the famous Captain Rugcrio, of whom Stephen had heard so much.

He was a man of about fifty years of age, tall, and of commanding presence, with a long black beard and fierce moustaches.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, “and so you have got the rascal! Well, let's see what he has got to say.” Then turning to the sergeant in charge he said: “This business is too pressing to allow waste of time in going to the guard-house, just put him into this house,” pointing to Don Rufino's door, “and I will myself examine him in private.”

It was the hour of the siesta, and the outer room was unoccupied. Stephen stepped in as ordered, closely followed by Captain Rugerio.

For a few seconds the two men faced each other in silence, Stephen wondering what was about to happen.

"And so, sir," suddenly broke forth Captain Rugerio, "you propose to set free our prisoner, Don Antonio Rodriguez! and to-morrow! and a very clever plan you have contrived, too, it appears, with your crane from the tree! All very fine, but I guess we shall have a word or two to say about that."

Stephen was thunderstruck.

How came this man to know so much? The Dictator's magic knowledge of all that was happening was no myth, then.

Following his startling surprise came a feeling of despair. All was over now for Don Antonio, for Pepita, and himself. The Dictator's arm was long, and smote hard.

Suddenly he resolved not to give in without a struggle. In the hurry of his capture the soldiers had forgotten to disarm him, so, quickly he seized his pistol and brought it to bear upon Captain Rugerio, resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible.

Captain Rugerio never flinched, nor did he apparently make any movement to draw his own pistol in defence.

He merely smiled grimly, and said: "No nonsense! That will not help you. My men are outside. At the sound of a shot they will rush in, and they would make short work of you and all in the house."

Stephen's arm fell as if paralysed. He realized his helplessness, and he would do nothing to bring danger upon Pepita.

But, recovering his courage, he again boldly faced Captain Rugerio, and cried in a bold voice, "I admit nothing! What have you to do with me?"

For a moment the captain gazed upon him steadily, and presently Stephen noticed a sudden change in his expression, which became more kindly.

"You are a brave young man!" he exclaimed. And then, to Stephen's amazement he addressed him in English in the words, "Come, my lad, perhaps things are not

so bad as you think. Friends often arise in the most unexpected places, and I mean to be your friend in this matter."

Had the ground opened up beneath his feet, Stephen could hardly have been more astonished.

The fact that the captain spoke English, and had probably got hold of the papers he had left with Don Antonio, at once explained much; but what could he mean by saying, "I am your friend"?

"Yes," went on Captain Rugerio, speaking English, but hurriedly and in a low tone, "it will astonish you, no doubt, to learn that I am your own countryman. I drifted by chance into the service of Dr. Francia, but then I had no idea of how things would turn out. I am as disgusted as anyone could be with the tyrant, and have long wished to leave him; but how can I do so? You know that here no one is safe from his vengeance; high and low are alike exposed to his wrath. Every man is a spy on the other. Were he to suspect my desire, my life would not be worth many hours' purchase. Therefore, when I discovered your plot in the course of my duties, I hailed it as a means whereby I too might make my escape from my hateful position. Listen, for there is no time to waste; even my men outside may suspect and denounce me if I spend too long a time in here. I can help you much in your plan, but it will now have to be carried out differently. I must, for the sake of appearances, take you to prison, but I will lock you up in the room next to Don Antonio's. There will be only an adobe wall between you, and I will contrive to leave you your knife. You understand? I will see that the bars are taken off the trap-door, and when the time comes I will look after the sentries. Your friends can still carry out your plan in the tree. You can leave word with the young lady to tell them what to do. Call her."

Stephen at once went in search of Pepita, whom he

found close to the door of the room in a state of great alarm. In a few words he explained to her the surprising event which had just occurred, and told her what instructions to give to the sailors when they arrived.

With blanched face Pepita listened, but by an effort managed to retain her presence of mind, for were not the lives of her father and of her lover at stake?

This over, Captain Rugerio resumed his stern expression, threw open the door, and called in his men.

“Ah!” he said to the sergeant, “now I know all. Take this fellow off to the prison. Put him in the vacant room next to Señor Rodriguez, and keep a close watch upon him.”

CHAPTER XLV

THE ESCAPE OF DON ANTONIO

THE events of the preceding hours had thrown Stephen's brain into such a whirl that it took some little time for him to be able calmly to contemplate the situation from his altered point of view. As he sat upon the bed in the room in which he was now locked up, a thousand doubts assailed him with regard to the possibility of his scheme succeeding.

Would the two sailors be able to find the house? Would they have the pluck and ability to carry out his plan? How was Don Antonio to be informed of the changes which would now have to be made? And so on. On the other hand, the chances of success would doubtless be materially improved through the aid of this new ally; but could he rely upon him? Might not his proposed offers of aid be only a part of a diabolical plan laid by the Dictator?

This thought drove him nearly mad, more especially as

he was now so helpless. He felt that he must act, do something, if possible, to advance matters, or he would go out of his mind. The guard had taken from him his pistols, but he was delighted to find that his strong "gaucho" knife, which he had carefully secreted in his girdle, had escaped observation. This gave him some hope, which rose considerably when he found, by examining the partition wall which divided him from Don Antonio's room, that it was only made of a single thickness of adobe, or sun-dried bricks. As these were built in mud mortar, he felt that it would be a comparatively easy matter to make an aperture into the next room.

But with a sentry constantly pacing before the window he did not venture to make any attempt to cut through the wall so long as it was light. Impatiently he waited for the coming darkness, and never had he experienced so long an afternoon. Nor even when the night had completely fallen did he venture to set to work, for, as he remembered, probably the jailer would soon be bringing him his evening meal.

It was well he had thought of this, for that functionary soon afterwards arrived bringing a loaf and a jar of water, all the meagre fare the prison afforded.

As soon as the guard had wished him good-night and locked the door, he decided to wait no longer. Dragging the bed close to the wall, he got down behind it, and with his knife began to pick out the mortar between two of the bricks. To his joy he found it yielded with comparative ease, and he was in a short time able to loosen one of the bricks and pull it into his room.

As he found that the noise he had been making, slight as it was, must have startled Don Antonio, he now ventured to call softly to his fellow-prisoner.

After a brief interval, which Stephen attributed to the old gentlemen's nervous fears, he had the satisfaction to hear the reply: "Here I am! Who is it calls?"

"It is I, Stephen, coming to your aid, come closer to the wall. Be cautious, lie down on the floor!"

Don Antonio, who had now recovered his presence of mind, gradually, by feeling along the partition, discovered the opening Stephen had made. When he was once there, Stephen was able to communicate to him in hurried whispers all that had occurred in that day, and the change it had made in their plans.

It took but a short time longer to enlarge the opening sufficiently for Stephen to be able to wriggle through it into Don Antonio's room. The two friends fell upon each other's neck in a close embrace.

"But there is no time to be lost," said Stephen, "let me try the trap-door and see whether Captain Rugerio has kept faith."

So saying he mounted the stairs. To his great satisfaction he found that the trap-door yielded after a slight push, and there was now nothing to prevent them from getting on to the flat roof.

Stephen thought that they ought to take their station there at once, so as to be ready for the next move. But he found that even this, the easiest part of their task, was by no means so easy of accomplishment as he had expected. Owing to the effects of age and his long confinement, Don Antonio had now become so weak and stiff in his limbs that it was with the greatest difficulty that he was able, even with Stephen's aid, to mount the stairs. At last he reached the roof and lay down exhausted.

All this time the pacing of the sentries, and every half-hour their loud cries of "Sentinel Alerte!" were clearly heard.

Stephen scarcely expected that his friends would be in the tree so early; and he watched the movements of the branches with eager anxiety for what appeared to him an eternity, but was probably not more than an hour.

It was a clear night, with just enough light from the stars

to distinguish objects a few feet off. At length he fancied he detected a movement amongst the upper branches, such as would be caused by a climber. His excitement rose to a high point.

At this moment they were startled by the sudden roll of a drum, and the word of command: "Guard turn out!"

"Great heavens! What can it mean? Has our evasion been discovered?" thought Stephen. The noise continued. The voice of Captain Rugerio could be heard calling, "Sentries to the front! Attention! Present arms to His Excellency! Stand steady!"

"What! The Dictator come to inspect! Good God, we are lost!" groaned Don Antonio.

Stephen remembered that he had been told it was the Dictator's eccentric habit to ride out only by night and at unexpected hours, some said for fear of assassination. He fancied he saw in this drilling and distracting the attention of the guard a part of Captain Rugerio's plan to assist him.

At that moment Stephen caught sight of some object pushing its way through the foliage of the tree towards him. "Thank heaven," he exclaimed, "it is the derrick!"

Nearer and nearer it came, and he soon made out through the dim light that it was really the derrick as he expected, and with a tackle and seat suspended from it as he had planned. But, alas! when it appeared to have reached its greatest extension it still fell short of the house by about three feet.

Had Stephen been alone this would have troubled him little. A bold spring from the roof would have enabled him to catch the ropes, and so to swing on to the tree. But it was of course completely beyond the powers of Don Antonio to attempt this feat.

Again his heart fell. It was most tantalizing to see delivery so near and yet unattainable.

Presently, however, he noticed that the tackle had been

slackened off a little and was beginning to swing backwards and forwards like a pendulum. He understood at once that the sailors had thoughtfully attached a light rope to the lower block, and were trying by this means to bring it into his reach. Getting close to the parapet, Stephen now ventured to stand up, and when the block swung nearer to him he was able by a quick movement to grasp it, and bring it and the bamboo seat hanging from it within the parapet. So far all was satisfactory. And now to rescue Don Antonio!

All this time the voice of Captain Rugerio could be heard uttering sharp words of command as he was putting the guard through various evolutions.

A flourish of trumpets announced the arrival of Dr. Francia.

Stephen crawled to Don Antonio, and to his dismay discovered that he was quite insensible. The excitement and the startling alarm of the drum had proved too much for him, and he had fallen into a swoon.

“Perhaps it is just as well,” said Stephen to himself, as he pushed the bamboo seat below the unconscious body and fastened the ropes. When all was ready he struck the tackle sharply three times, the vibration travelled along the taut ropes, and the men in the tree began to haul up. So long as Don Antonio was on the roof, Stephen was able to assist them by half-lifting, half-carrying the weight, but when at length he had to let him swing clear, there came another anxious moment. Would the derrick withstand the weight? He could see it bend like a fishing-rod, and hear it creak as if it were about to snap. But it held.

Presently Stephen noticed that one of the derricks was being shortened, he understood this by seeing the lattices closing, and then the upper rope was slackened off gradually. By this manœuvre the direction of the jib was altered and swung round so that the tackle with its burden hung perpendicularly behind the wall enclosing the garden of the

prison. The tackle was then rapidly slackened off, and the body of the unconscious man gently and safely lowered behind the wall.

“Thank God for that!” muttered Stephen.

In another moment the derricks had been brought back to their former position, and Stephen, without waiting for the tackle to be swung, made a flying leap at the ropes, and soon was safely lowered beside Don Antonio. The derricks were then allowed to collapse, and immediately were concealed behind the foliage of the sycamore.

Just then a shout arose from the guard, “Long live ‘El Supremo’, Dr. Francia!”

CHAPTER XLVI

THE LAST OF LOPEZ

THOUGH they had now accomplished an important part of their task by getting Don Antonio safely out of prison, there were still many and great dangers to be faced before the rescue was complete. The old gentleman lay in a state of complete collapse and insensibility beside the garden wall. It would be necessary to remove him at once to some place of shelter and greater security.

Stephen gave orders to lower the bamboo framework which had served as derricks. By detaching a section of one of these, opening it out to a width of a little over two feet, and lashing it with a rope in that position, they had at their disposal a useful stretcher, upon which they laid the unconscious man, and were thus able to carry him along easily.

The streets were now deserted, in accordance with the regulations of the Dictator, and as it was such a short distance, and as the guards engaged on parade, Stephen

thought that they might venture to take Don Antonio to the house of his friend Don Rufino, where Pepita was waiting in an agony of suspense.

The journey was accomplished in safety. The delight of Pepita in being once more able to embrace her father, even though he was still unable to respond, can easily be imagined. Soon, by the aid of restoratives, Don Antonio returned to consciousness, and was able to realize that he was free from the horrible captivity, though still in great danger.

There was no time to be lost, and a hurried consultation took place as to the best means of getting down to the boat and beyond the reach of Dr. Francia's vengeance. It was Don Rufino who suggested the most likely means. Asuncion had been for some weeks scourged by an epidemic of small-pox, the daily number of victims being alarmingly great. By order of the Dictator, who, it was reported, went in constant dread of death, and hated anything which would remind him of it, all funerals took place immediately, by night, and, since the priests had been expelled, without religious ceremonies.

From a neighbour's house there had been a funeral that very night, which had been numerously attended. Don Rufino suggested that, as he was upon intimate terms with the people, he might be able, by representing that his sister had just died, to borrow the garb in which mourners always appeared in these sad processions. This garb consisted of a long black domino with a hood covering the head, similar to the costume worn by the "familiars" of the dreaded "Holy Inquisition". When it had been donned it was difficult for a casual spectator to discern the identity or even the sex of the wearer.

Stephen and the others accepted the idea. Don Rufino at once went on his quest, and soon returned with his arms laden with the sombre garments.

The stretcher upon which Don Antonio had been brought

to the house was then covered with black cloth, a pall was improvised out of a couple of black shawls, while a cross, cut out of white cloth, was hastily stitched upon it. All then arrayed themselves in the funereal costume, including Pepita, Don Rufino, and his sister.

The procession moved out slowly, but without any attempt at secrecy. Sandy and Mick took up the stretcher, Don Rufino preceded them bearing a torch, as was the custom, the others formed up behind.

They had proceeded in this order for a few hundred yards when they suddenly heard the clatter of horses' hoofs at a gallop, and presently a troop of horsemen surrounded them.

It was the Dictator and his staff on one of their midnight rounds.

The cavalcade stopped suddenly, and a voice, which Stephen recognized as Dr. Francia's, called upon the funeral procession to halt.

From the light of the torch they could see the gaunt form of the Dictator, who was closely followed by Captain Rugerio and Don Ignacio Lopez.

"Who is this that you are burying? Where is your license?" cried Dr. Francia.

It was his foible that he should know the details of everything that went on in the country.

The danger was imminent, Stephen saw at once, but he had presence of mind to reply in a deep voice: "We have left our license at home, your excellency!"

"Ha! That is quite out of order!" retorted Dr. Francia. "But who is the person you are burying?"

This was a poser for Stephen. It would be useless to give a name at random, for Dr. Francia prided himself upon knowing the names of all people in Asuncion.

Had Don Rufino preserved his presence of mind he might have avoided suspicion by giving some well-known name, his own for example, but instead of this he merely aroused

the curiosity and suspicion of Dr. Francia by muttering in reply:

“Only a poor man of no importance, your excellency.”

With anger raised to a high degree by this evasive answer, the Dictator cried, “Ha, I must see more into this!” and, leaping from his horse, he strode to the head of the bier, evidently with the intention of throwing back the pall from the face of the corpse.

An instant more and detection was inevitable. But Stephen cried, “Take care, your excellency, he died of the small-pox.”

As if stung by a viper, Dr. Francia started back, mounted his horse, and rode off followed by his escort.

“Another terribly narrow escape,” said Stephen; “but fortune seems to favour us to-night, my friends. Be of good courage, all danger is now past.”

In this, however, he was mistaken, for though the procession reached the dark and deserted cemetery unmolested, when it was passing on towards the river, where the boat awaited them, they again heard the clatter of hoofs and a loud voice commanding them to halt.

As the horseman approached, they recognized, to their horror, the sinister figure of Don Ignacio Lopez.

His face was contorted with rage, and he yelled out furiously: “Ah, I knew I was right in my suspicions! I am glad I rode back. It’s no use trying to deceive me, you are contriving the escape of Don Antonio Rodriguez!”

Further concealment was indeed useless, and now all that could be done was to escape to the boat as quickly as possible.

Fortunately the watchers were on the alert, and brought the boat up at once to the land.

“Now,” said Stephen, “Don Rufino, you see about getting in the women and Don Antonio. We will hold this man in check, he is only one against three.” So says

ing, he unsheathed his knife and the sailors drew their pistols.

At this moment the attention of all was drawn off by the shouts of another horsemen, who was riding up through the darkness. It was Captain Rugerio.

"Get into the boat, men!" he shouted in English; "leave me to deal with this fellow!"

A yell of surprise and rage burst from Lopez. "What, you too—you a traitor!"

Instantly two reports resounded in the air. The shot of Captain Rugerio appeared to have missed, but that of Lopez had told; the commandante fell from his horse as if dead.

Lifting the apparently lifeless body in their arms, Stephen and his friends bundled it into the boat, then jumped in themselves and pushed from the shore before Lopez had time to recover his presence of mind.

When he realized that his prey was escaping from him, he seemed to lose all reason, and, leaping from his horse, jumped frantically into the river as if with the mad idea of overtaking them.

An instant later a wild yell rang through the darkness.

"An alligator has caught him!" exclaimed Don Rufino.

CHAPTER XLVII

SAFETY AND HAPPINESS

AIDED by the current, the boat soon reached the schooner. Don Antonio, and the still insensible form of Captain Rugerio, were carefully lifted on board, and the captain was instructed to cast off the moorings of the schooner, and to make away as rapidly as possible down the river.

Father Anselmo, who was already waiting on board,

proved to be of invaluable assistance. In his capacity of missionary in a remote part of the country he had acquired some experience in simple medicine and surgery, and he now offered his services to attend to Captain Rugerio. While the schooner was lying at the Indian village he had occupied himself by making a collection of the medicinal herbs which abound in those regions, so that he was also able to do much to restore Don Antonio.

An examination of Captain Rugerio showed that he was not dangerously wounded. Lopez's bullet had struck him on the breast, just over the heart, but had glanced off a rib and embedded itself in the muscles, whence it was easily removed. His greatest injury, that which had made him insensible, had been caused by the headlong fall from his horse.

By next morning the *Tridente* was miles below Asuncion and free from danger of pursuit.

Both the invalids were doing well, but Captain Rugerio was too weak to be able to talk. Don Antonio, on the contrary, was now quite elated, and more anxious to converse than perhaps his strength allowed. He questioned Stephen eagerly with regard to the events of his escape, of which he had but a dim recollection. He thanked him and the sailors repeatedly for what they had done, and he expressed regret that his physical weakness had caused him to lose consciousness, a circumstance of which he appeared to be rather ashamed.

Stephen discussed with Don Antonio the character of Dr. Francia, and expressed surprise that a man of such great intelligence as he remembered him to have shown in the interview they had at his country house should have developed so rapidly into a brutal tyrant.

“I confess,” said Don Antonio, “that he is an enigma to me also, and the most charitable construction I can put upon his acts is that he is really partially insane. Born to a certain extent a genius, with faculties and education far

above the level of those surrounding him, with learning far greater, he has overestimated his own capacity by comparing it with that of his neighbours, and there has thus arisen in his mind exaggerated self-esteem, and contempt for all others. He cannot bear to have near him anyone with pretensions to education, nor one who is regarded by the people with any degree of affection and respect. I fear that this explains the cause of his great enmity to me. Then the docile nature of the Paraguayans, of which you have had some experience, and which caused them to be so easily subjugated by the Jesuits long before Dr. Francia's time, facilitates the carrying out of his arrogant pretensions. Bad as the times now are, I fear they will be much worse if Dr. Francia is allowed to carry on his rule without restriction."

And now Stephen imparted to Don Antonio and Pepita the great news of the recovery of the Jesuits' treasure, which they naturally received with much emotion, showering upon him their hearty congratulations.

A favourable, uneventful voyage of four days brought the *Tridente* to the port of Corrientes. There they decided to remain some time to allow Stephen and the two sailors to bring down the treasure to the schooner. This would also give an interval of rest to the invalids and aid their recovery, and an opportunity for the disposal of the cargo of the schooner.

All went as well as could be desired. The treasure was found as it had been left, and was safely brought on board, and in about a fortnight Don Antonio and Captain Rugerio were sufficiently well to continue the voyage.

With feelings of satisfaction and happiness such as may be imagined but scarcely described, Stephen stood on the deck of the *Tridente* as she sailed from Corrientes on her way down-stream to Santa Fé. For now he had attained the position he had so long hoped for, and that more quickly than he had ventured to anticipate. The value of the treasure turned out upon examination to be quite equal

to, if not greater than, Father Anselmo's estimate, so that, even judged by an old-world standard, he was no longer a poor man, with the certain prospects of increasing his capital at a much quicker rate than he could have done in Europe.

Don Antonio had quite recovered his health and spirits, and naturally Pepita's happiness had correspondingly increased. They had both congratulated Stephen heartily upon the unexpected stroke of good luck which had come to compensate him for the loss of his prospects in Paraguay, and Don Antonio frequently discussed with him as to the best means of using his fortune.

"Perhaps," said the old gentleman as they walked the deck one moonlight night, "your idea will now be to return to England. If so, I cannot blame you, as I remember you left a dear mother there; and besides, this country, if it offers more opportunities for money-making, is now so disturbed by political misrule, and apparently likely to be so for years, that there is little to induce one who desires to lead a tranquil life to remain in it."

"At one time," replied Stephen, "it certainly would have been my idea to go home at once, had I possessed far less money than that which I now own; but, my dear friend, has it not struck you that there is in this country an attraction which holds me with even a greater force than the calls of love and duty to my mother?"

"Indeed," said Don Antonio, glancing slyly at him, "and what can that be? Is it the scenery and free life upon our boundless pampas?"

"No," boldly replied Stephen, though his voice trembled slightly, "I think I can credit you with more perspicacity, in spite of your jesting words. Have you not guessed, have you not seen, that I love Pepita with all my heart and soul? Great as has been the struggle, I have never ventured to say a word of this before, either to you or to her; but now I hope you will consider my position is such

as may enable me to ask for her hand without presumption."

"My boy," said Don Antonio, laying his hand kindly upon his shoulder, "I have long foreseen and hoped for this; and believe me, had you come to me without a cent you could call your own, I would still have gladly acceded to your request. I have watched your character for years; I have found much in it to admire, and but little to censure. I am sure you will make Pepita happy, and to assure her happiness is now my sole object in life. You should also remember that you have really put us under an obligation which we can never repay. I cannot forget that you have saved our lives, hers once and mine twice, so that you have fairly won your reward. Now go to Pepita with my blessing, and I think she will not receive you unkindly."

As if treading on air, exalted to the seventh heaven, Stephen left the side of his old friend in search of his lady-love. But she was nowhere to be seen, upon the deck or below. Suddenly he recalled that eventful night in Asuncion when, in the delight of meeting him once more, she in her excitement actually betrayed her love. Strangely affected by the association of ideas, he almost involuntarily gave utterance to the well-remembered cry, "Pep-eeta!"

Almost immediately the young lady appeared on deck. She too remembered the circumstances under which she had last heard that signal, and, rushing up to her father, she cried: "Do you want me, Papa?"

"No," replied Don Antonio waggishly, "but Stephen does; and I have promised that if you don't object I will make a present of you to him."

The blush which mantled the cheeks of the young girl was sufficient proof to both that she did not object, and Don Antonio, gently taking her hand, placed it in Stephen's.

What need is there to intrude upon the sacred interview which followed between the now affianced lovers, at last free to express the feelings they had so long cherished in secret?

CHAPTER XLVIII

CAPTAIN RUGERIO'S STORY

THE news was too good to keep, and Don Antonio could not refrain from telling it next morning to Captain Rugerio, who lay in a long chair upon the deck, still too weak to move about. Don Antonio and Stephen had often discussed the mysterious man. In spite of Father Anselmo's diagnosis he appeared to have been much more seriously injured than had been believed, for, after nearly a fortnight, he was still too ill to be able to converse at any length with his fellow-passengers. Upon this morning, however, he had recovered wonderfully, and seemed to be really anxious to talk. He called Stephen to his side, and after congratulating him upon the good news which he had just heard from Don Antonio he said: "And now let me thank you for saving my life and rescuing me from the terrible position in which I was placed."

"Rather," said Stephen, "we should thank you for the invaluable aid you rendered to us. Without such help we should not have been now in the happy position in which we find ourselves."

"Tush, that was nothing!" hastily replied Captain Rugerio; "I really acted as much for myself as for you, as you will see when you know all."

There was something pathetic in seeing this great bearded man lying so helpless, and still endeavouring to conceal by brusqueness any softness of feeling which the others might wish to attribute to him. Stephen somehow felt strongly

drawn to him, for he fancied he saw under the affected fierceness of his manner a noble, kindly disposition.

"No doubt," resumed Captain Rugerio, addressing Stephen, "you and your friends have often wondered that I, who claim to be your countryman, should have been found in such an invidious position as that of the commander of the military forces of a tyrant like Dr. Francia. Mine is a curious story, and it is right that you should hear it before judging me. Twenty years ago I was a light-hearted British sailor, happy in the enjoyment of success achieved, with still brighter prospects, when the event happened which cast a gloom over my whole life and entirely altered my career. I had sailed from Bristol as first mate of one of the finest ships which ever left that port, bound for the East Indies, and I had the promise of the owners that if all went well on that voyage I should be promoted to captain on the next. My only grief was in separating from my darling wife for a little over two years, and from my child, as fine a boy as a father could desire. Seafaring men, however, must put up with such separations; it is a part of their calling. Our voyage went on prosperously until we had arrived in the latitude of the River Plate, where we were one day attacked by a heavily-armed vessel flying the flag of Spain. I do not remember whether England was actually at war with Spain or not in those days, but it mattered little to those privateers, who were really no better than pirates. Of course we resisted. No English vessel would strike its flag to a Spaniard without a fight, however great the disproportion might appear to be between their relative strengths. It was only after a long and severe struggle, in the course of which our captain and more than half the crew fell, that we were at last forced to surrender. Our ship was brought into Buenos Ayres as a prize, and we, the survivors, were sent as close prisoners to various places in the interior, probably as much with the object of preventing us from communicating to our govern-

ment how we were captured as from any idea of our being dangerous to Spanish rule. For many months I was closely confined, until at last the Spaniards, finding themselves in need of help to repulse the frequent raids of the Indians, offered me my freedom if I would enlist in their army for service on the frontier. I would have done almost anything to escape from the vile durance in which I had been held, and so gladly accepted the proposal. For years after that I was kept constantly on active service, and I suppose that my conduct met with approval, for I was gradually promoted to the rank of sergeant; and finally, upon the occasion of a more than usually successful expedition against the Indians, I was given a lieutenant's commission. By this time I had become, in my language and ways, so assimilated to the Spaniards that they almost seemed to forget that I was not one of themselves. The name I now go by is really a corruption of my English baptismal name. I became habituated to the life, and even liked it, and would scarcely have left it even if I had had the opportunity, for, truth to tell, I really enjoyed the celebrity I now had throughout all the northern provinces. My reputation must have reached the ears of that wonderfully astute man Dr. Francia, for about two years ago a secret emissary of his waited upon me, and with much circumlocutionary caution he conveyed to me an idea of that ambitious man's projects, and sounded me as to my willingness to co-operate with him. He led me to expect great advantages if I would accept his overtures, and finally, for I will not deny that I too am ambitious, I agreed. You know that to a certain extent Dr. Francia complied with the undertaking of his agent, and that he put me in command of his army. I soon discovered, however, that my new position, though exalted, was untenable by any man of honour or scruples, and I longed to get out of it; but it is no easy matter to extricate one's self from the toils of such a suspicious tyrant, and there were none around me

whom I could trust. You know how at last I was so fortunate as to escape through your aid. I have said that I was ambitious, yet when I had attained to an elevation far higher than I had ever ventured to expect, believe me, I was by no means so satisfied as I had anticipated, and I have often looked back with regret upon the happy days when I was merely the first mate of the *British Clipper*."

"Mate of the *British Clipper*!" cried Stephen excitedly. "What, then, was your name in England?"

"Why, I thought I had told you! It was Roger Herrick."

"Roger Herrick!" repeated Stephen, becoming still more excited; "then I am your son, the little boy you left behind you! What wonderful things happen! Oh, Father, Father, at last I have found you!" and he threw his arms round Captain Rugerio's neck.

It took some little time for Roger Herrick, as now we must call him, to understand the position, and when at last he realized it he became quite as excited as Stephen. He plied his new-found son with questions about his mother, and groaned when he heard of her troubles, and how she had married again. He expressed his intention of going immediately to England to claim her. Then, suddenly recollecting the relations between Stephen, Don Antonio, and Pepita, he called them all together and told them how happy he was to be present as a father to bless the proposed union.

The few remaining days of the voyage were spent in complete happiness by Stephen and his friends. For hours the young man would sit with one hand in his father's, the other in that of his affianced, talking of their past and of their future, while Don Antonio looked smilingly on.

At Santa Fé the treasure was landed, the remainder of the schooner's cargo sold, and the *Tridente* was released to return to Buenos Ayres.

Here Mick Scanlon announced his intention to leave the party. He had arranged to marry Doña Manuelita, and to start as an estanciero with the capital realized from his portion of the treasure.

Roger Herrick was impatient to go off to England, and Sandy Fulton decided to accompany him. Before they left, however, they had the pleasure of seeing Stephen and Pepita married by the bishop of the province, the wedding being attended by all the *élite* of the society of Santa Fé.

It was announced that they would henceforth reside with Don Antonio at the estancia El Porvenir.

CHAPTER XLIX

FIVE YEARS LATER

IT is a summer evening, and the sun is just about to dip below the level horizon which bounds the view across the plains at El Porvenir. Its parting rays gild a scene which Stephen, as he rides up to the gate, remembers to have been a very different one when he first saw it some nine years ago. For the estancia has been greatly improved. A handsome house, in the middle of an extensive garden, has taken the place of the simple structure which then stood there, and the enclosures for the cattle, as well as the houses of the peons, are all neatly and substantially built.

Stephen is not alone. With him there rides, dressed in a general's undress uniform, a gentleman, who, though his hair and beard are now iron-gray, one would have no difficulty in recognizing as Roger Herrick, the quondam Captain Rugerio, still apparently as vigorous as when he commanded the guard of the Dictator of Paraguay.

As they approach, a graceful young lady with a baby in

her arms, and followed by two toddling children, comes out to meet them.

"Well, Querida Esposa," cries Stephen, "has all gone right during my absence?"

"Perfectly," replies Pepita, who looks even more beautiful than when we saw her last, "but the children have so longed for Papa!"

"Dear little fellows!" exclaims the happy father. "Come and see what Papa has brought you from Buenos Ayres; and here is Grandpa too, anxious to kiss you. Doesn't he look grand! Just back from the wars, safe and sound."

The gallant general and his son leap from their horses and throw the bridles to a peon, and in a minute have each a happy little chap riding on his shoulder with arms round his neck, and so make a triumphant procession up to the house.

There the other grandfather is waiting for them in the veranda. Don Antonio has evidently just risen from his bamboo reclining-chair, in which it is his wont to spend the hot hours of the afternoon. He is still hale and hearty, though his beard and hair have now blanched to a silvery white.

"And Mother?" cries Stephen somewhat anxiously.

"Much better," replies Pepita; "she will be here presently," and immediately there appears in the veranda a gentle-looking gray-haired lady, who welcomes her husband and son in that sweet voice which Stephen loved so much as a child.

Stephen has become accustomed to her appearance now, but he still remembers the shock which he felt when, after their long separation, she arrived from England about three years ago, and he observed the great change that had come over her. Little wonder that it did, when the trials and sufferings she had undergone were remembered. She had related to him the intense anxiety which his

hurried departure had given her, especially when months and then years sped past without her ever hearing from him. How Ebenezer Herrick, after his first outbreak of wrath, had given orders that the boy's name should never again be mentioned, and how he became more stern and sullen than ever. "Perhaps," charitably suggested his mother to Stephen, "some of this change may have been attributable to remorse for the manner in which he treated you." But things had gone from bad to worse at the farmhouse. Trouble after trouble arose, and finally the old man only escaped being carried off to a debtor's prison by falling ill and dying just at the time when his creditors were about to foreclose upon him. Then the farm had been sold up, and the desolate widow had sought refuge with some old friends in Bristol, in whose hospitable home she was discovered by her long-lost Roger.

"It was an awful experience," she said, "to meet with one so long mourned as dead; but at the same time full of rapturous joy when I had realized that it was no illusion, my love had actually returned, and still more delightful to hear that he brought such good news from you, my dear boy.

"You can picture my feelings; one day brooding over my sad lot, husband and son both gone, and nothing but a life of sadness and poverty before me—nothing to live for, and only the kindness, the charity of friends to depend upon,—the next day to know that my real, my only loved husband had come to take me to his arms, and that my son lived and was wed in a beautiful land across the seas, and had called for us to come and share his home."

But the reaction had been almost too much for the poor mother, and for many days she lay between life and death, nor for months did she recover sufficiently to venture upon the arduous undertaking of the long voyage to the southern seas.

At length, however, the start was made, and Stephen had

the supreme pleasure of welcoming his parents under his own roof; for it was his own by that time, his father-in-law having retired and formally made over the estate to his daughter and her husband.

For long after his mother's arrival she was but a feeble invalid, but gradually the fresh strong airs of the pampas restored her to a certain measure of strength, and though every now and again she had recurrences of weakness, she was now apparently steadily returning to health. So Stephen saw when he affectionately saluted her as he exclaimed: "Why, Mother, you have wonderfully improved while I have been away; the roses have returned to your cheeks."

Captain Rugerio had found the tranquil life at the estancia hang heavy on his hands, but there was no need for a man of such energy to remain idle. The new colonial government, now constituted under the name of the Argentine Confederation, had many battles to fight for its existence, both with political opponents and with the Indians. The services of a soldier with such a brilliant reputation were eagerly sought for, and in the army of the republic he rapidly rose to the rank of general. He had now just returned from a successful campaign, and hoped to enjoy a well-earned furlough. Stephen had gone to meet him at Buenos Ayres.

"But come in, come in," cried Don Antonio, "you must be famishing after your long ride."

Soon they were seated at table in the handsomely-furnished dining-room, which might have been taken for one of the best rooms in a Buenos Ayres or Montevidian mansion. There was one object in it to which Stephen's eyes always turned with affectionate interest, especially after an absence. It was the painting of the naval battle round which his boyish imagination had woven so many delightful fancies.

The conversation turned upon the affairs of the estancia,

now one of the richest in the whole province, with cattle, horses, and sheep in thousands. Little wonder that Don Esteban Herrico, as he was generally called by his neighbours, was looked upon as a personage who, had he cared to become a citizen of the republic and to enter politics, might have been elected to high office, or even to the governorship of the province.

“Whom do you think we met in Buenos Ayres?” said Stephen to Don Antonio. “Why, our old comrade Mick Scanlon, who told us how greatly he was prospering on his cattle estancia in Santa Fé. He has now four children, and he told us that his Manuelita had turned out even a greater ‘threasure’ than he had expected. He was handsomely dressed, and his horse-gear was resplendent in solid silver. Few would recognize now in the rich Don Miguel Escanlon, the poor ‘gossoon’, who left his home so hurriedly on account of the trouble over ‘Biddy Malone’s pig’. He was tremendously pleased to hear from a man newly arrived at the Plate who came from Ballymashanty, that his old mother was living comfortably upon the small fortune which had been sent her by her ‘son away out there in the Indies’. You see she can’t write, poor thing, so that it isn’t often that Mick hears of her.

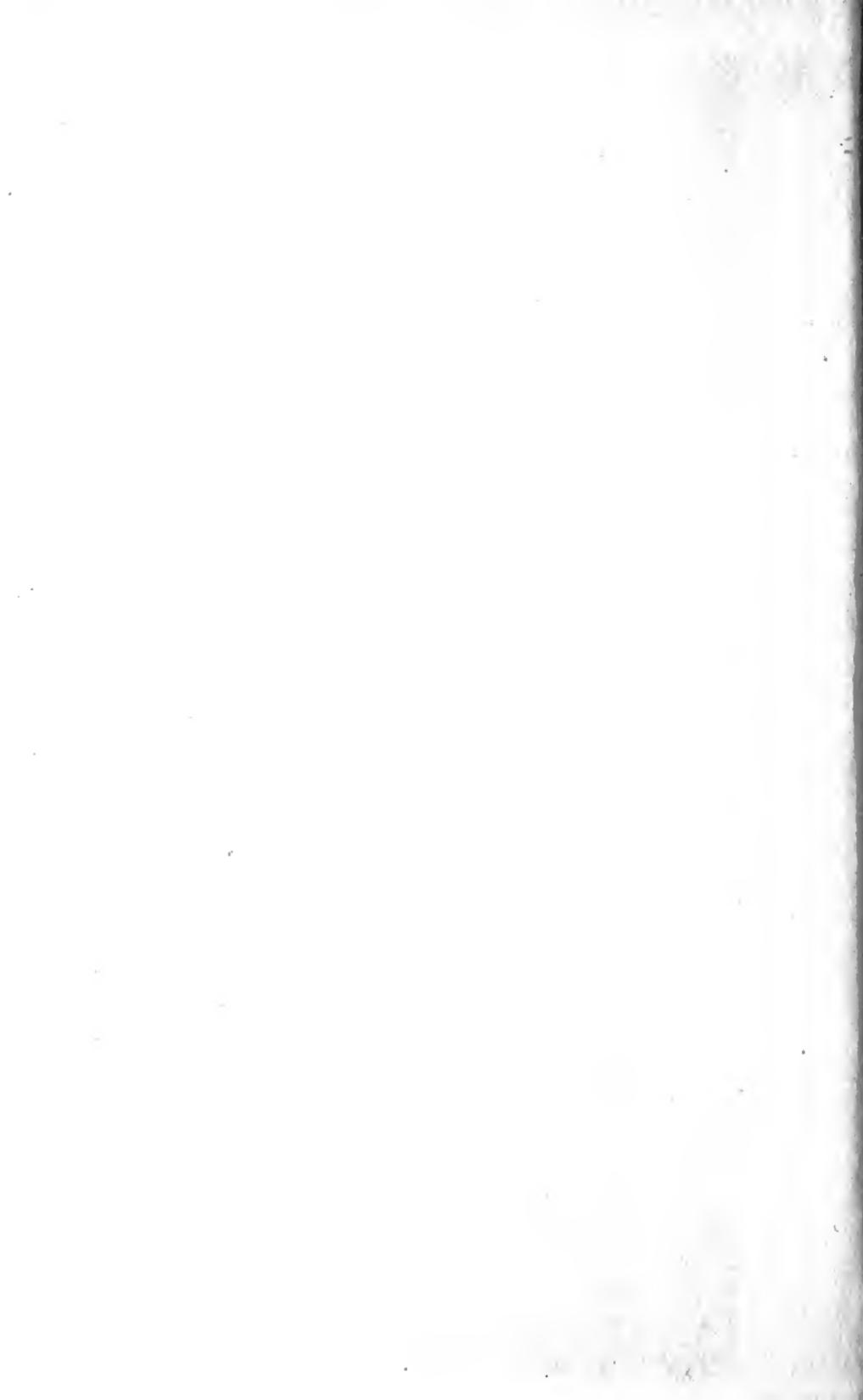
“But Mick has a good piece of news for us; for he says that he has had a letter from our old friend Sandy Fulton, who has at last found Scotland too cold for him. He has decided to come out and settle in this sunny clime, and he is bringing a wife with him.”

After dinner the gentlemen went out to smoke under the veranda, and the conversation soon turned upon the career of Don Francia, who still ruled with a rod of iron over the timorous and submissive Paraguayan people. Terrible stories of his cruelties were constantly reaching Buenos Ayres, although some people professed to admire the strength of his character, and even wished they had such a dictator to preserve order amongst the turbulent

politicians who were constantly fomenting revolutions.

"They would very soon change their opinion if they were brought into close quarters with him," said Don Antonio. "For myself, I can never be too grateful for my escape from his country, nor too thankful to you, my dear friends, who rescued me from Francia's grip.

THE END



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